Vol.17

ROKUDA NOBORU

F
VOL.17

F

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VOL.17

RESIDENTS OF THE FOG

F

VOL. 17
RESIDENTS OF THE FOG

Chapter 1: Incognito
Chapter 2: Flat Spot
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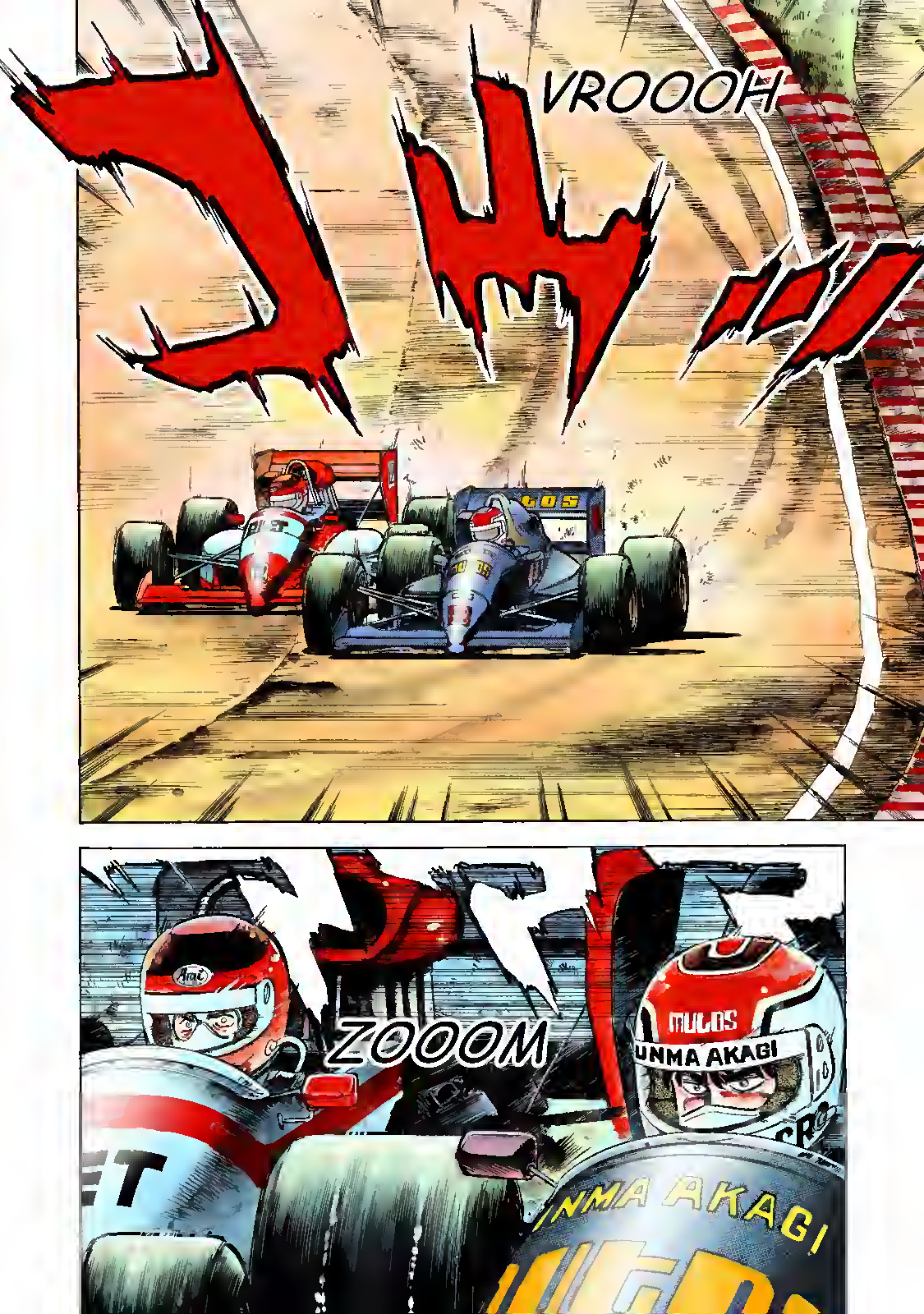
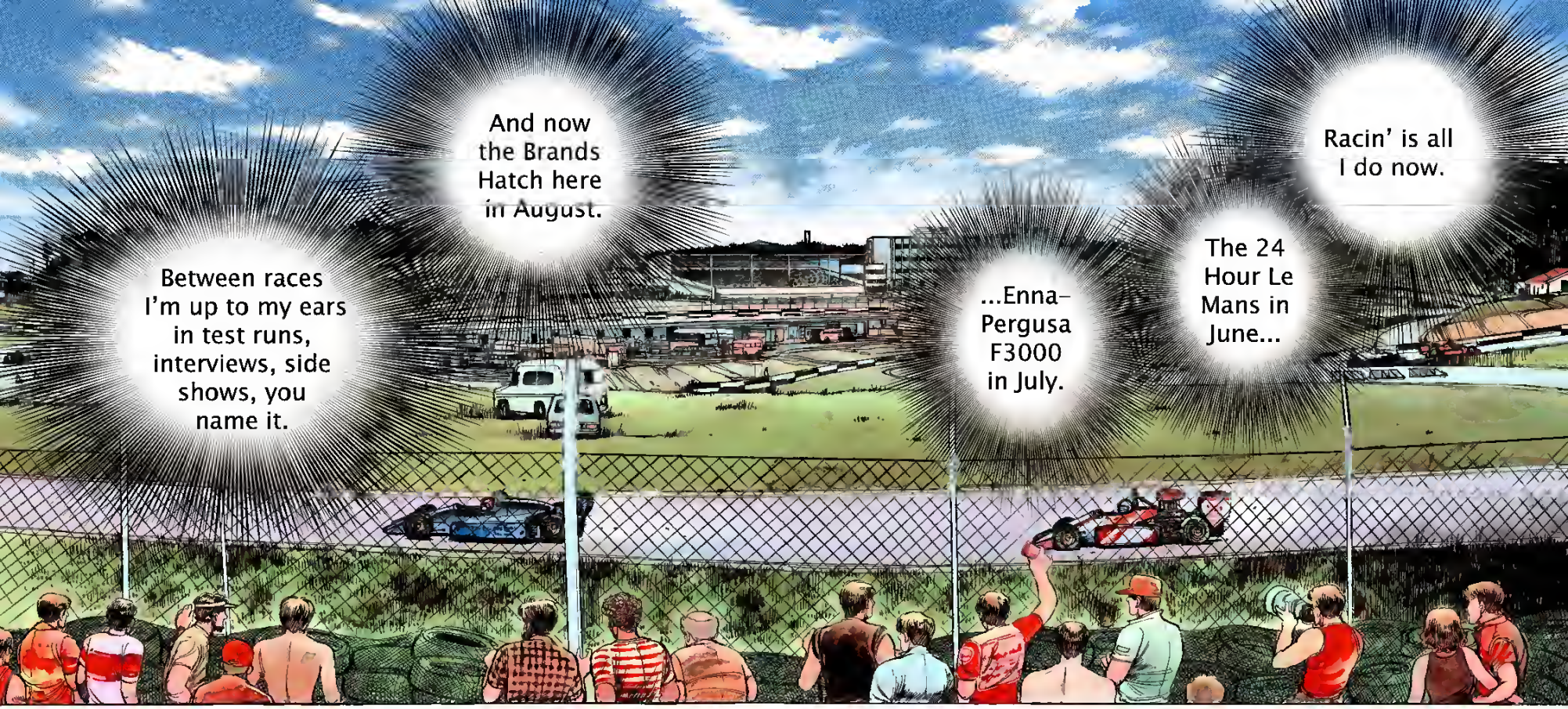
Chapter 11: Beam of Light
Chapter 12: Salt Water

Chapter 1:
Incognito
KONI
MITSUBISHI MOTORS
DAILY MAIL
MITSU


VROOOH
ZOOOM
MULOS
UNMA AKAGI
UNMA AKAGI

You singin'?
mutos
INMA AKAGI
Sako...
VROOOM
HANCE RACING TEAM
38
mutos
Sigh...
AVON
It's been two months since you left.

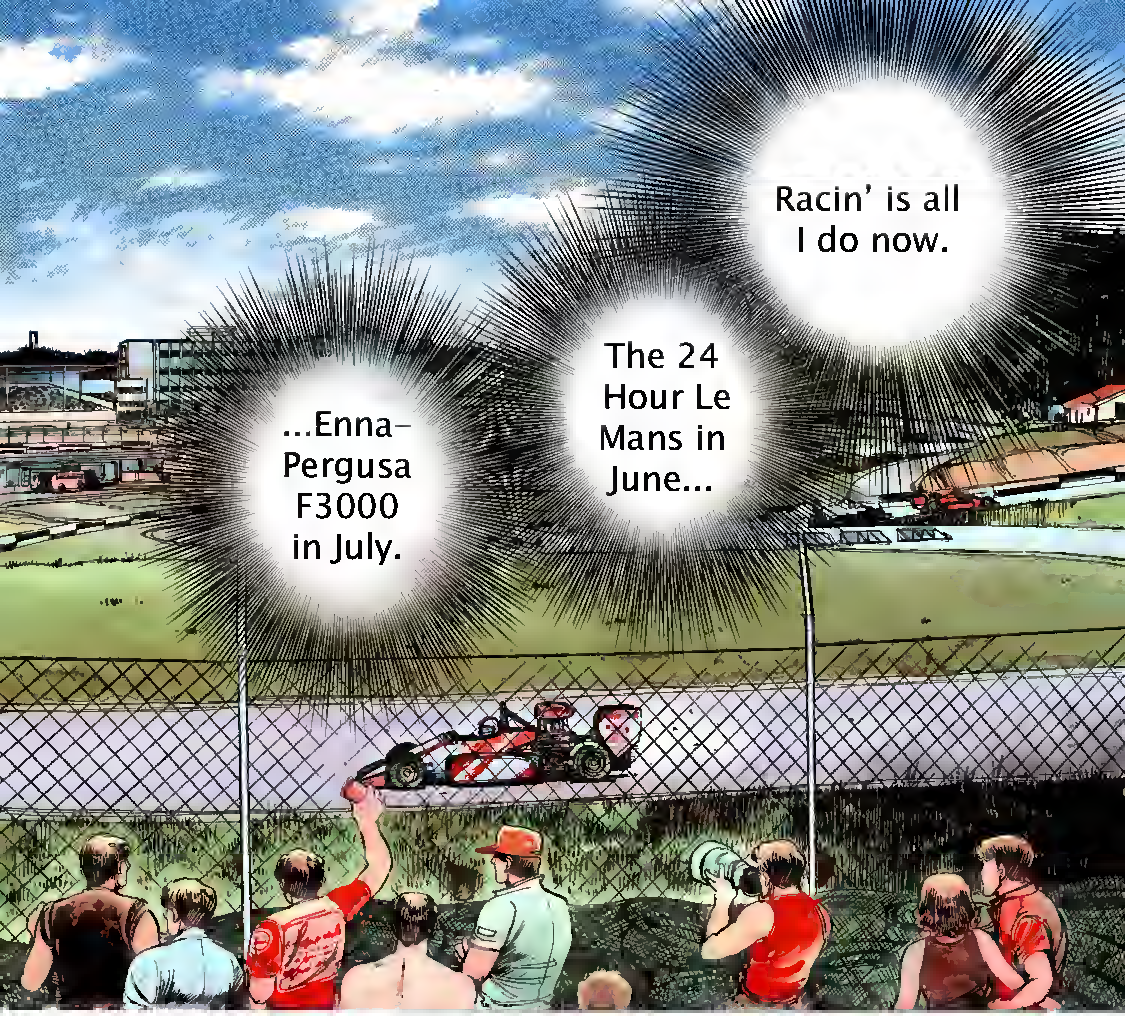

Between races I'm up to my ears in test runs, interviews, side shows, you name it.
And now the Brands Hatch here in August.
...Enna-Pergusa F3000 in July.
The 24 Hour Le Mans in June...
Racin' is all I do now.

And off the booze for good?
Are you singin' now, Sako?
GUNMA AKAGI
MUGOS

This is our final decision.

I can't give up my singing, and you can't abandon your racing.

You stamped out my dream!


Racin' is all I do now.
The 24 Hour Le Mans in June...
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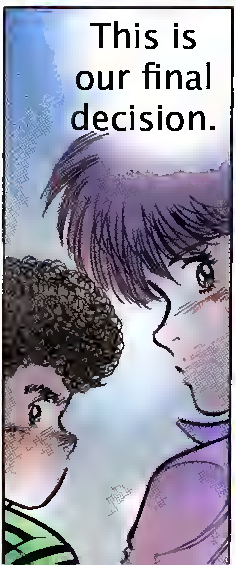
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AKAGI

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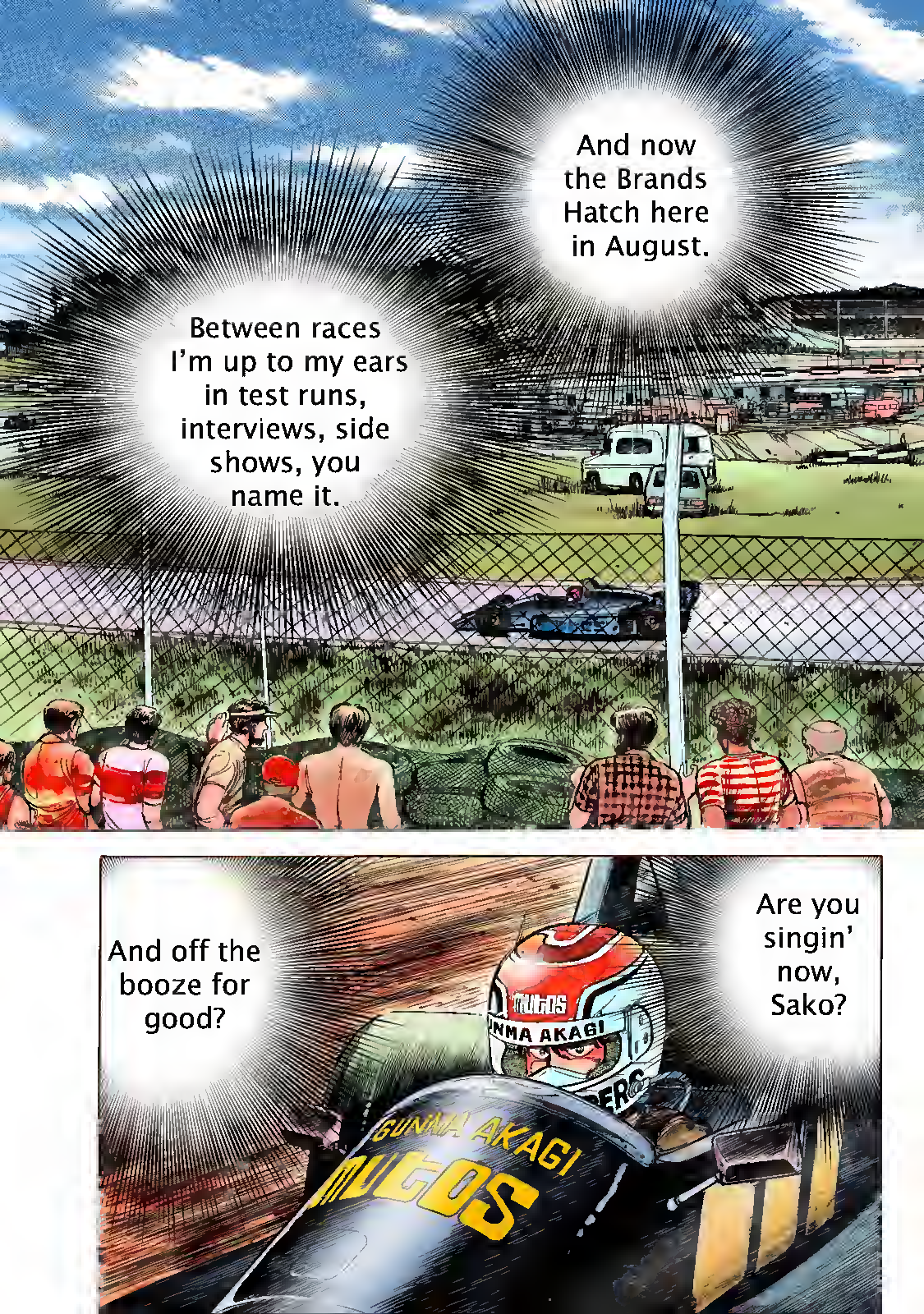
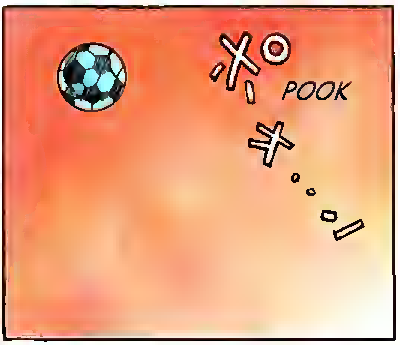
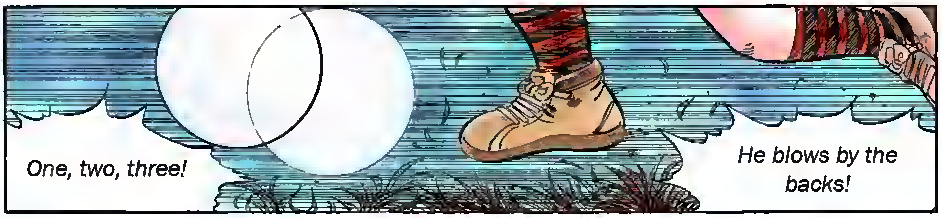

And now the Brands Hatch here in August.
Between races I'm up to my ears in test runs, interviews, side shows, you name it.
And off the booze for good?
Are you singin' now, Sako?
GUNMA AKAGI
MUGOS

THUNK

Centering!

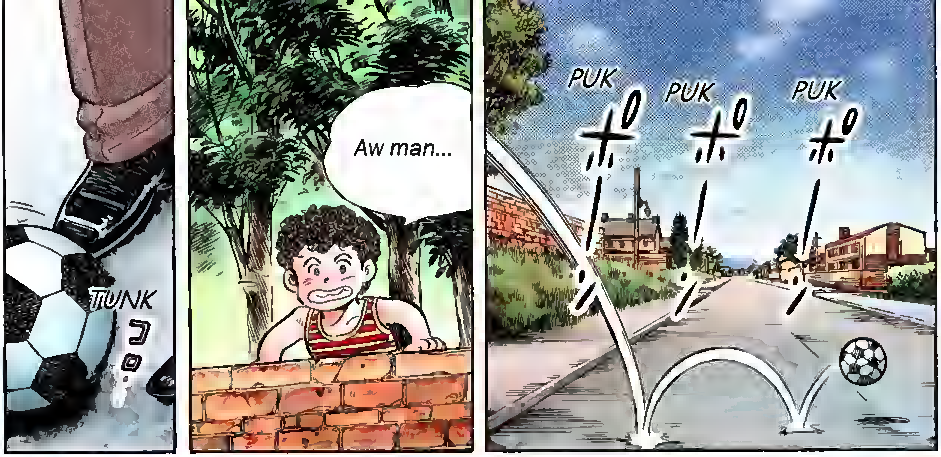

POOK


One, two, three!
He blows by the backs!

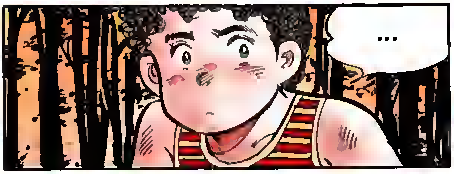
He...!
PAKOOM

He shoots...

He feints...


TUNK
Aw man...
PUK
PUK
PUK

Is there a pretty young woman living around here?


...

!?
Hey there, lad. I'm wondering if you could help me.

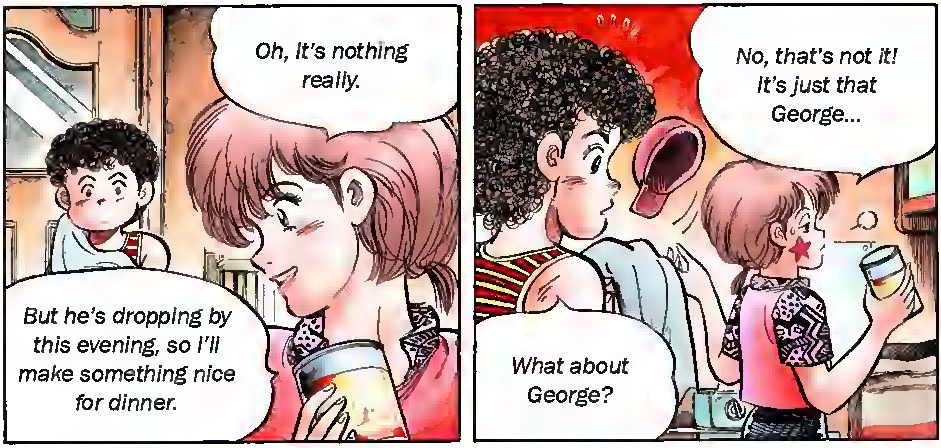
I'd like you to tell me if you know.
She's been on TV a lot lately, a singer. Do you know anything about that?

Gimme back my ball.

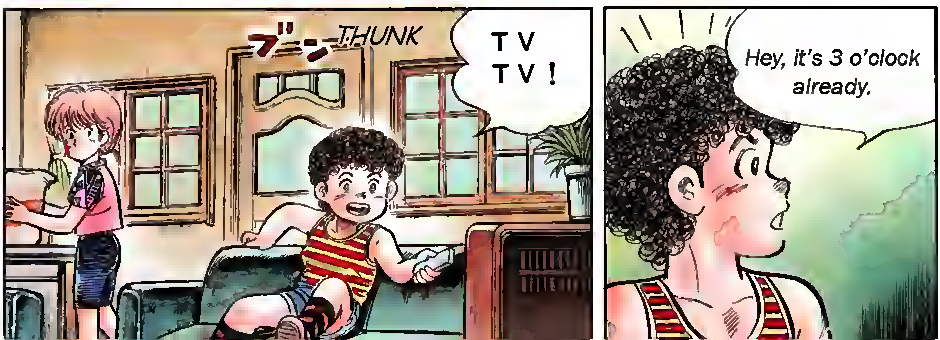
I believe she just moved to the area.
You live close by as well, don't you?

SWOOSH
I'm not telling a stranger, dummy!
Are you sure? Where is your house, lad?
I dunno anybody like that. Gimme my ball back!
Your ball...
Hey, boy!
Dang it.
HUFF
はあ
HUFF HUFF
はあ
はあ
I didn't know you were home, Sako.
SLAM
バタン!
Hi, Peabow.

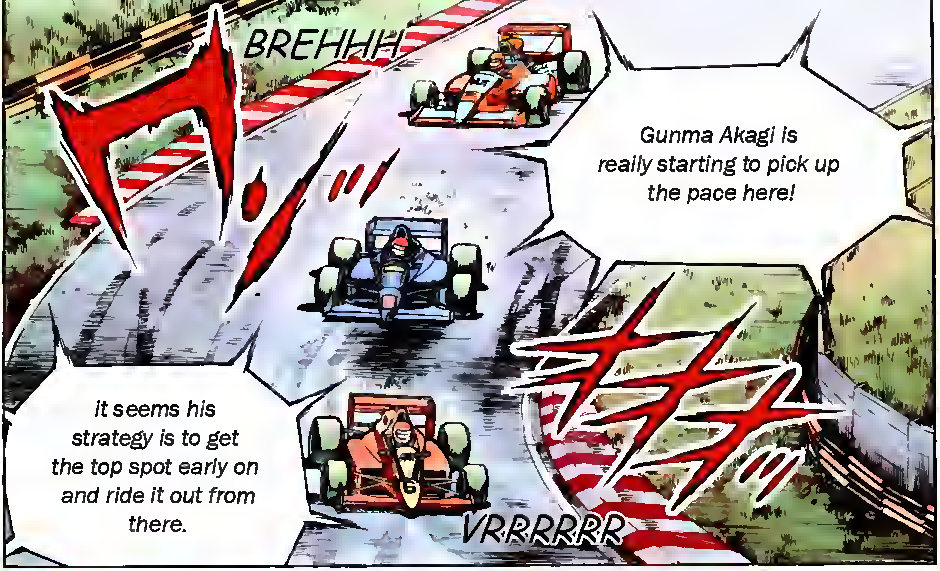
You're famous!
ニヤー
SHEEEEEH
It's such a bother, having to put on this disguise just to go shopping.
There's some weird men walking around out there.
I know.

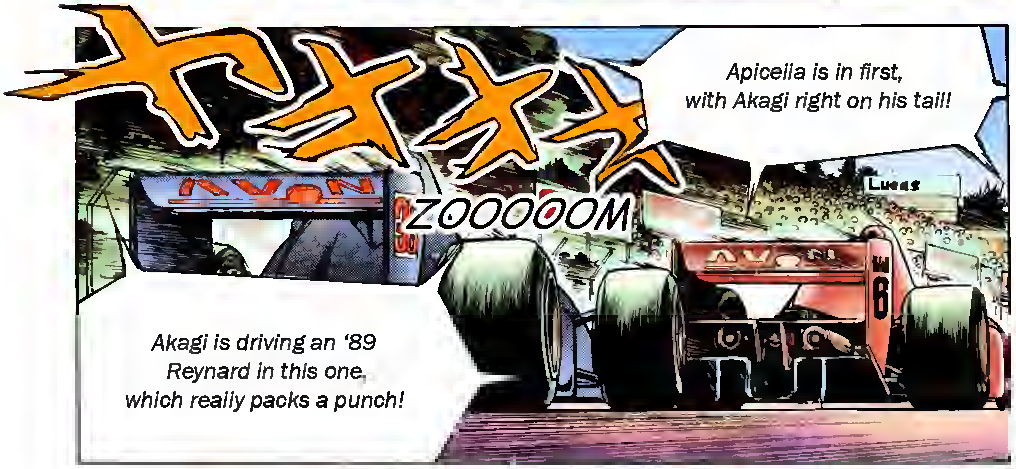

Oh, It's nothing really.
But he's dropping by this evening, so I'll make something nice for dinner.
No, that's not it! It's just that George...
What about George?

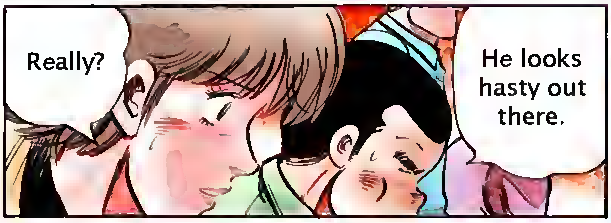
Again... huh?


ブーン
THUNK
TV TV!
Hey, it's 3 o'clock already.

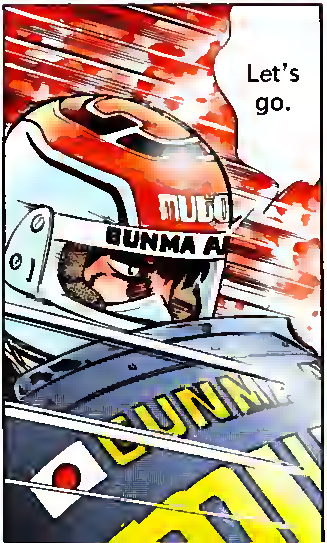
...
The moment you've been waiting for, a live showing of the European F3000!
We're here at the Brands Hatch circuit, where Race 6, the final race of the series, has already kicked off.
Great...
Whoa! Check it out, Sako. Gunma's in second place!
He must be stress free now that we're out of his hair.
That jerk!
Yeah, yeah.
Don't talk like that, Peabow. If he's doing well, we should be happy for him.
VOOOOOOM

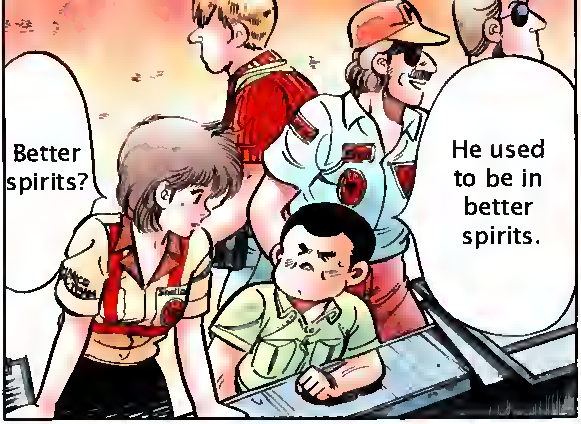

BREHHH
Gunma Akagi is really starting to pick up the pace here!
it seems his strategy is to get the top spot early on and ride it out from there.
VRRRRR


ZOOOOOM
Apicella is in first, with Akagi right on his tail!
Akagi is driving an '89 Reynard in this one, which really packs a punch!

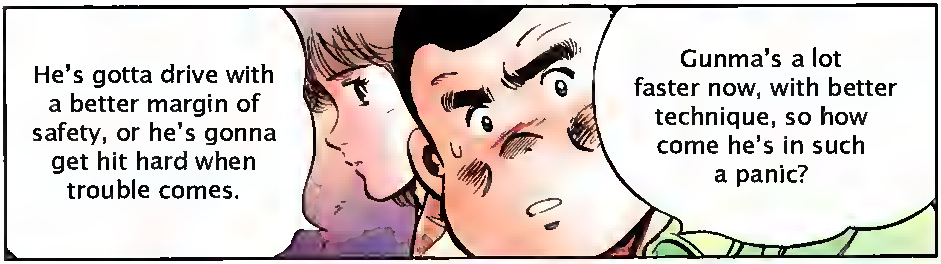

Really?
He looks hasty out there.

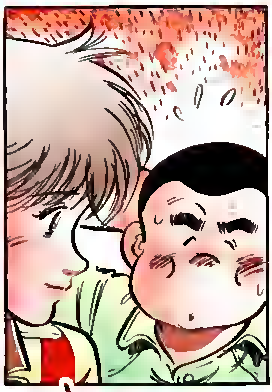
It don't look right, like he's really tense or somethin'.


Let's go.


Better spirits?
He used to be in better spirits.

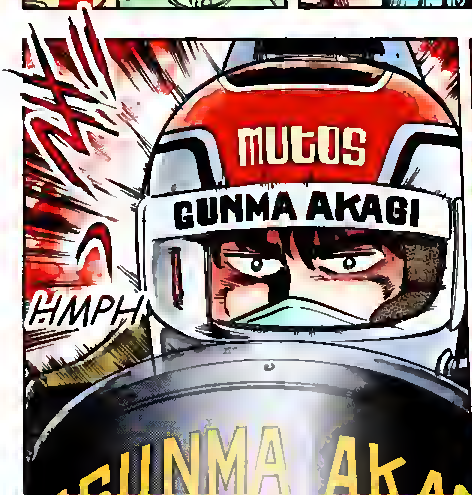
Isn't that how he's always been?


He's gotta drive with a better margin of safety, or he's gonna get hit hard when trouble comes.
Gunma's a lot faster now, with better technique, so how come he's in such a panic?

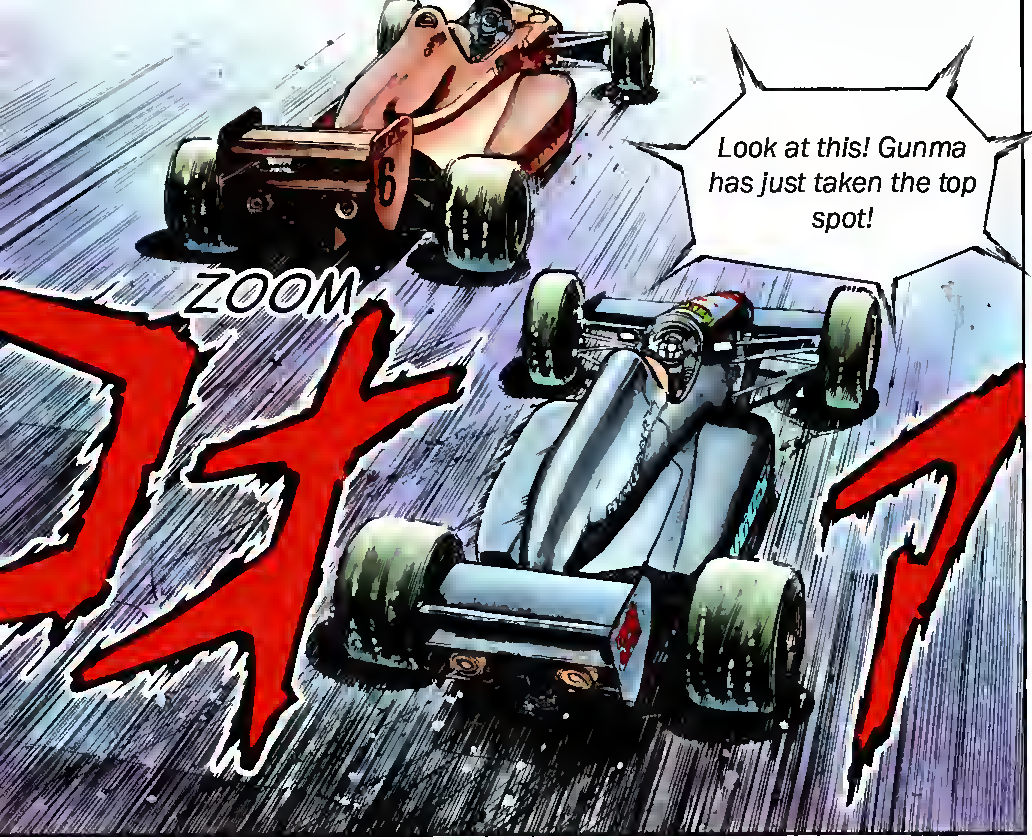


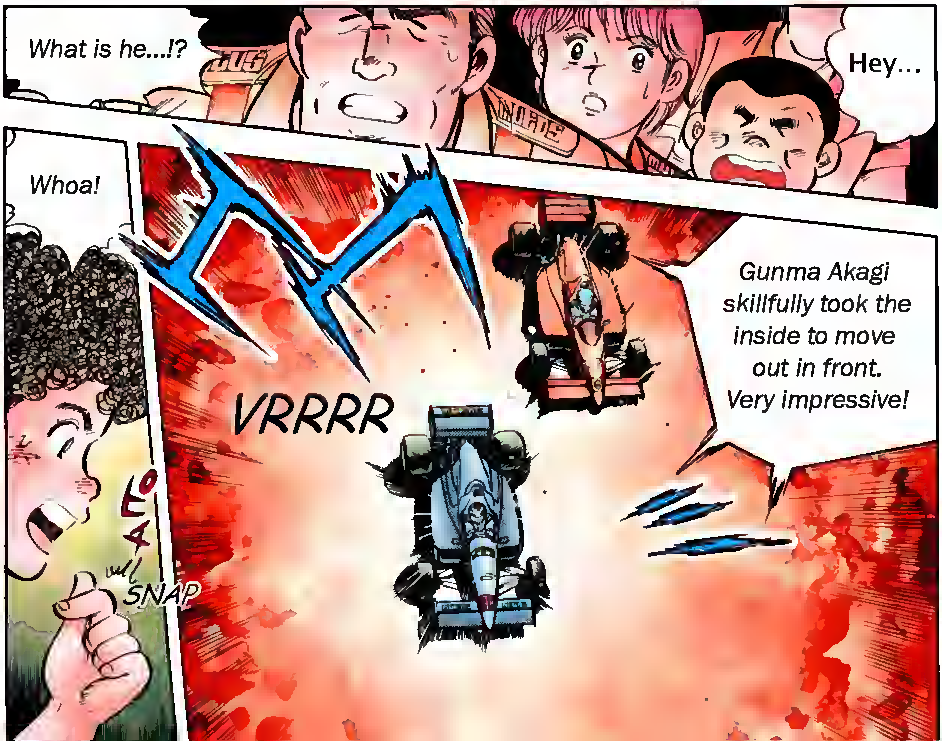
Okay, we'll go along with Tamotsu and tell him not to rush it.

...

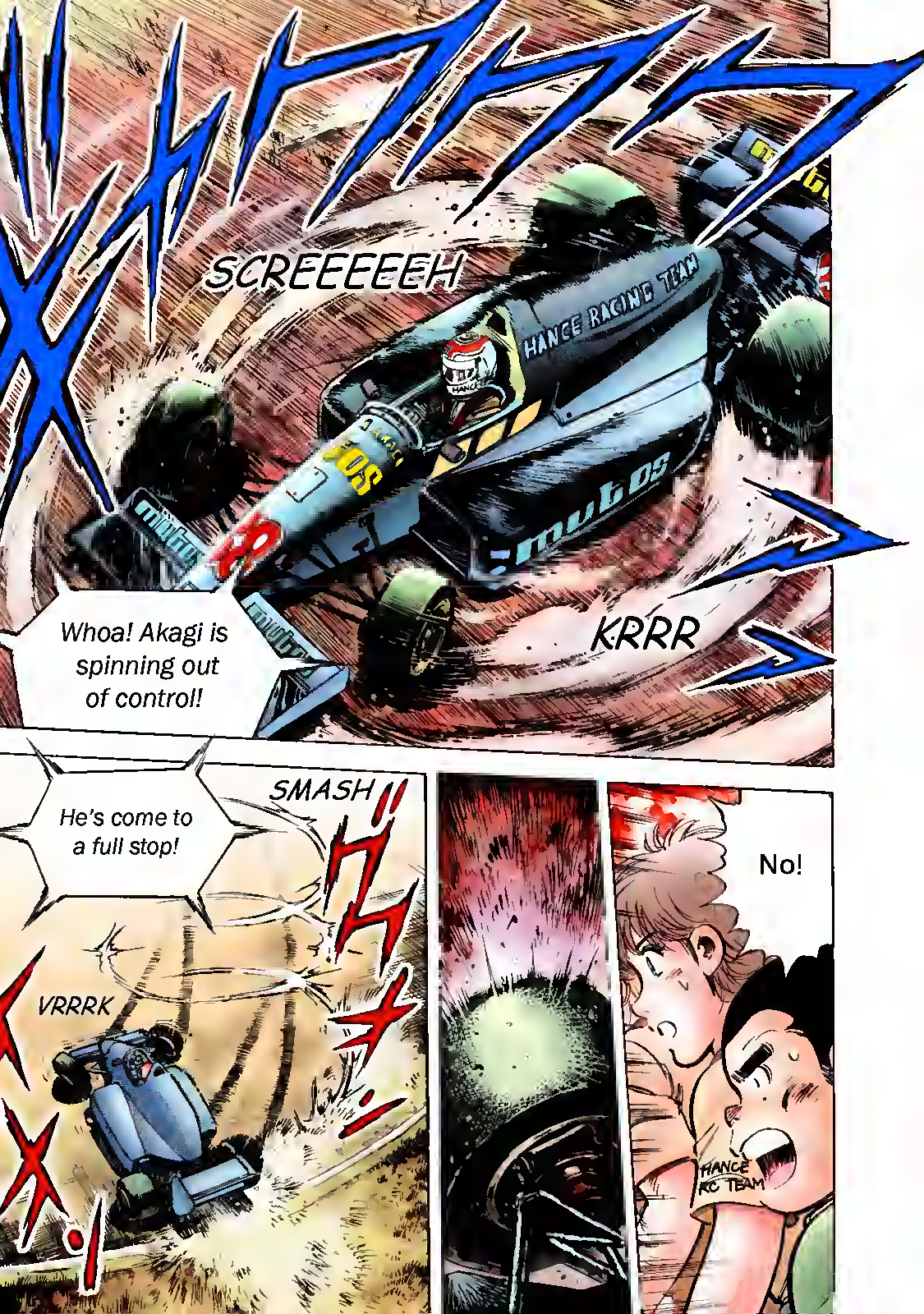

mutos
GUNMA AKAGI
HMPH

GUNMA
WAIT!

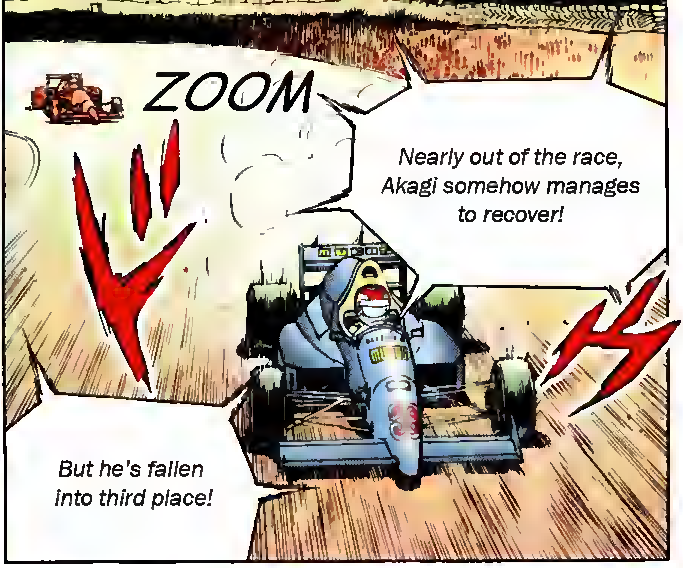

ZOOM
Look at this! Gunma has just taken the top spot!

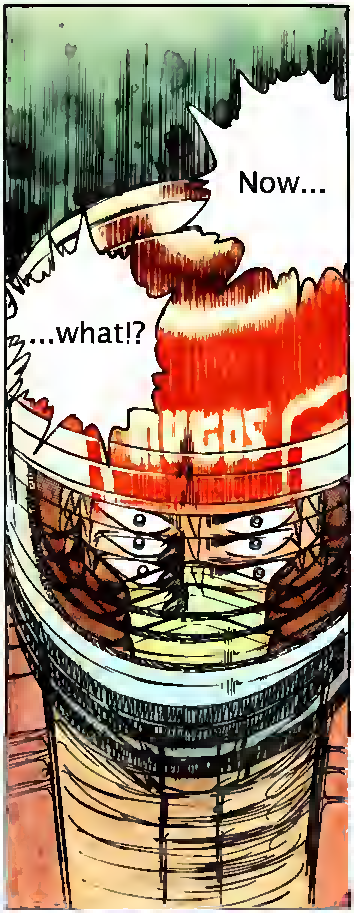

What is he...!?
Hey...
Whoa!
VRRRR
Gunma Akagi skillfully took the inside to move out in front. Very impressive!
SNAP

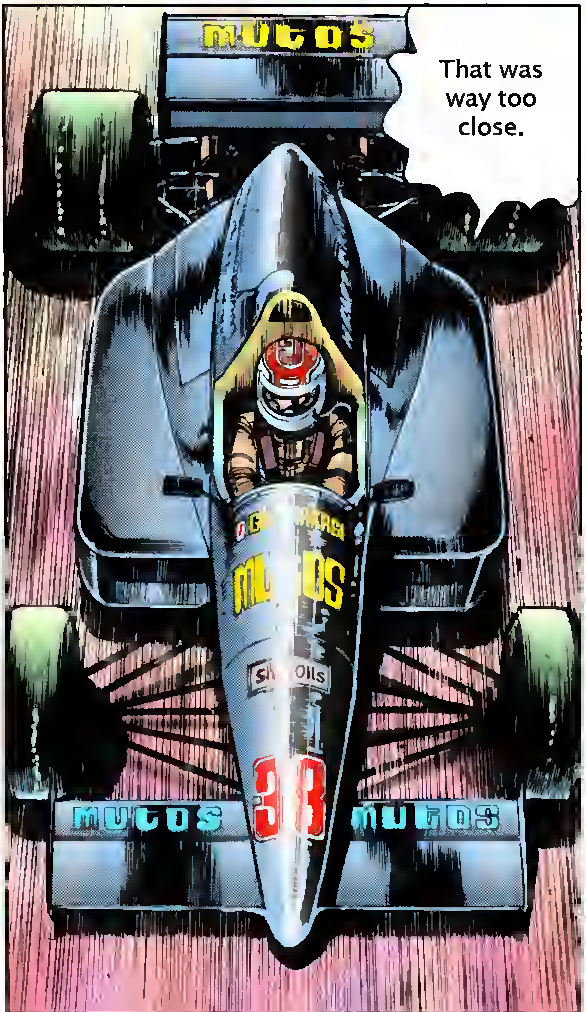
GUNMA AKA
Dammit! It won't engage!
KRRK
IRRR
KRRK
VROOH
Damn thing's in neutral...
IRRRRRK
SKREE
Come on...


SCREEEEEH
HANCE RACING TEAM
Whoa! Akagi is spinning out of control!
KRRR
He's come to a full stop!
SMASH
VRRRK
No!
HANCE RC TEAM

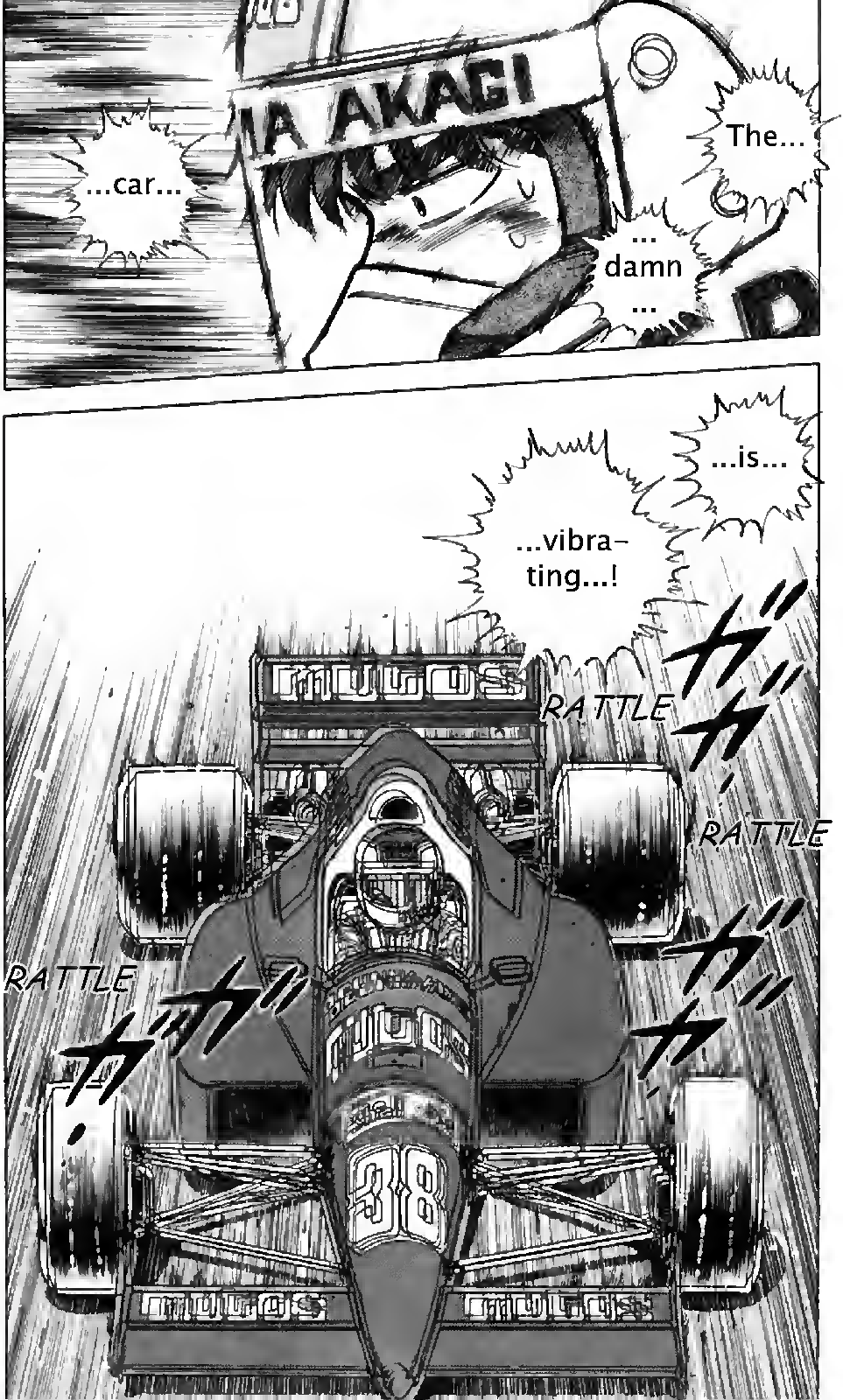
Whew...
MUTOS
GUNMA AKA
HA


ZOOM
Nearly out of the race, Akagi somehow manages to recover!
But he's fallen into third place!

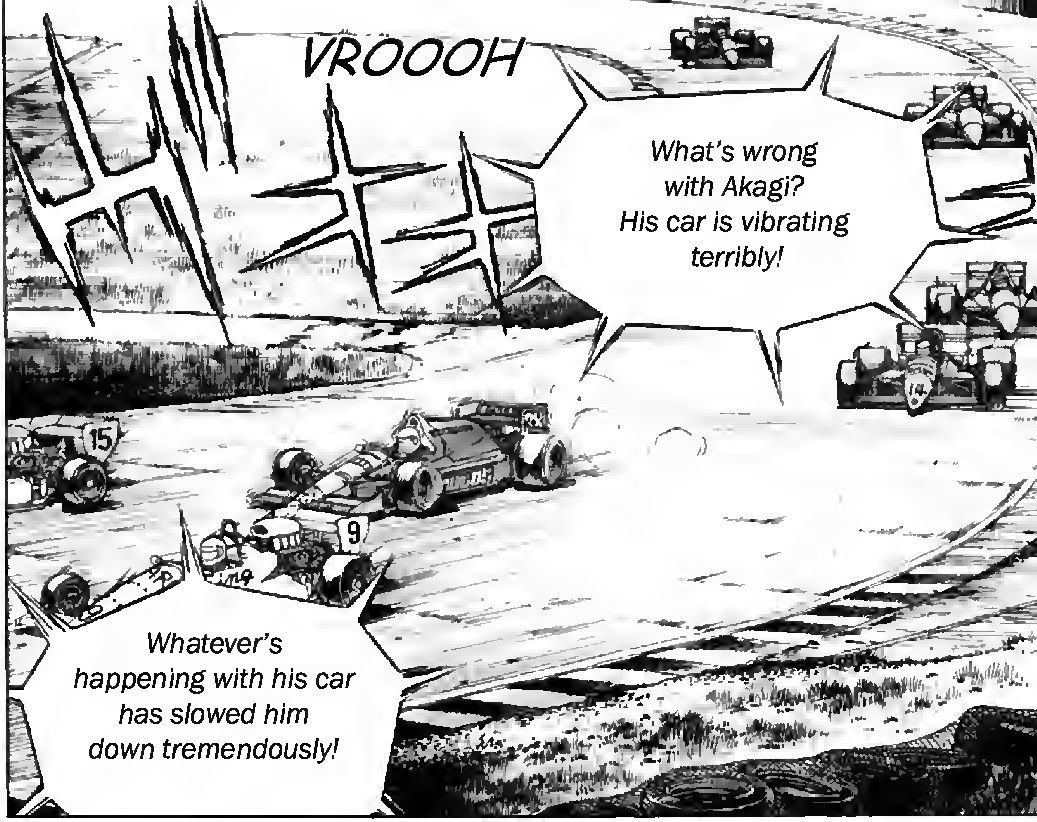

Now...
...what!?
MUTOS

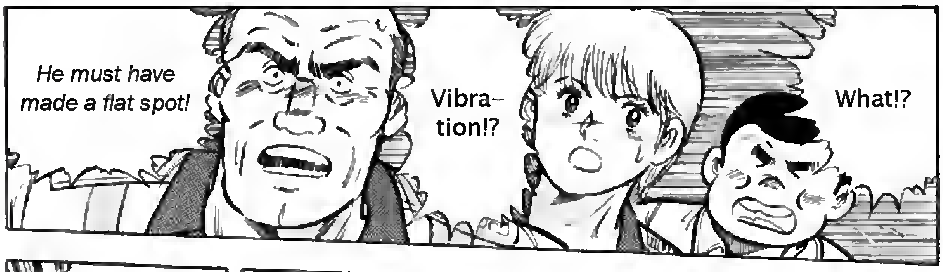

MUTOS
That was way too close.
MUTOS
MUTOS
3
MUTOS

Chapter 2:
Flat Spot
CHEL


...car...
...AKAGI
The...
...
damn
...
...is...
...vibra-
ting...!
RATTLE
ガガ
RATTLE
RATTLE
ガガ
38

RATTLE
...in that spin.
... gone outta whack ...
Somethin' must've...
...havin' an epileptic fit!
VROOOH
This whole damn car is...


VROOOH
What's wrong with Akagi? His car is vibrating terribly!
15
9
Whatever's happening with his car has slowed him down tremendously!


He must have made a flat spot!
Vibra-tion!?
What!?

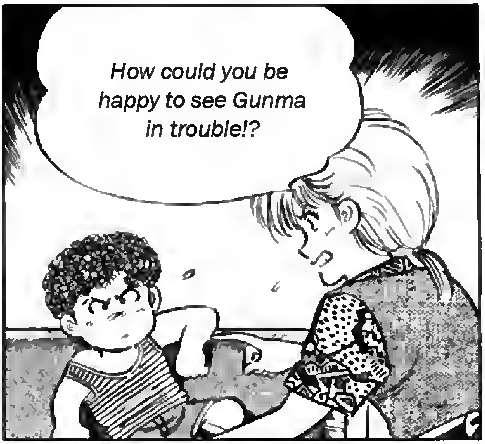
What's a flat spot, Tamotsu?
Set up for a tire change!
We told him not to get hasty, dammit!
Flat spot?

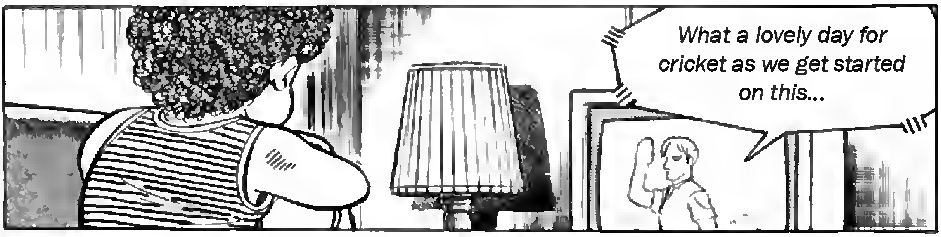
...his tires probably locked and part of 'em were shaved down by the friction.
When Gunma spun out...
Basically it's when a part of the tire gets flattened.
...so we can change out those tires!
At this point he's just gotta come back to the pit...
That's why his car's been vibratin' so bad each time those tires spin.
RYDON
ゴゴゴゴ
VROOOOOH
VRRRRRRR
ゲゲゲゲー
Gunma continues his downward spiral in the rankings...
He'll have to deal with that vibration the best he can and get back to the pit!

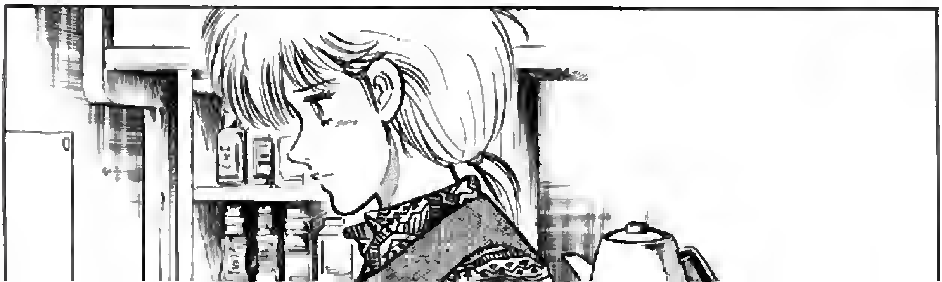
Ha! Serves him right.
What an unfortunate turn of events for Akagi, who was in first at one point!
Allow me to explain what happened...
When a car spins out of control...
...the tires will either spin incredibly fast, causing the car to drift and lose its grip...
AKAGI
...or in Gunma Akagi's case, the tires will lock up as the car loses traction on the course.
The former case is preferable...
If he doesn't get into the pit for a tire change, the terrible vibration caused by those flat spots will prevent him from racing efficiently.
...as the latter, which Akagi experienced, will create "flat spots" on the tires that could really ruin his chances.

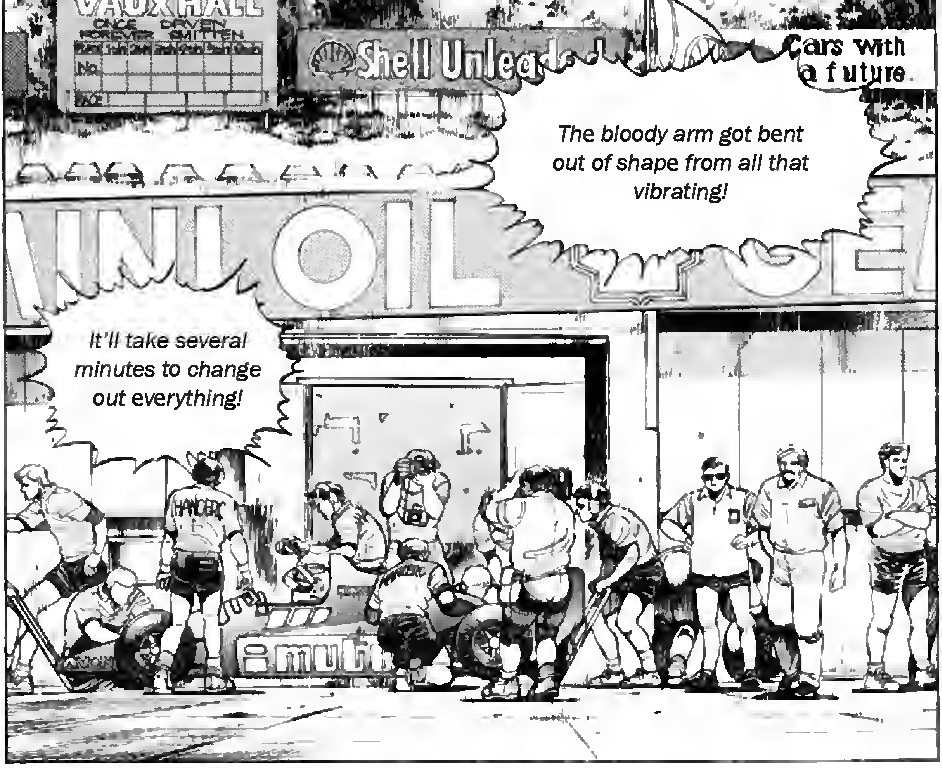
You're terrible, Peabow.
Why'd you turn it off!?
Hey!
CLICK

CLICK
...

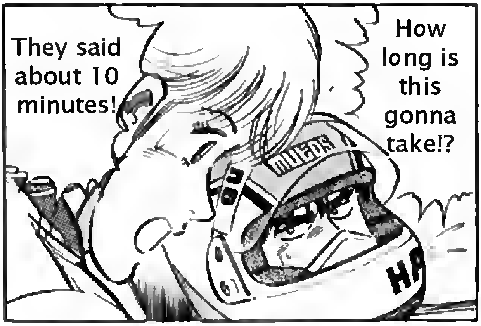

How could you be happy to see Gunma in trouble!?

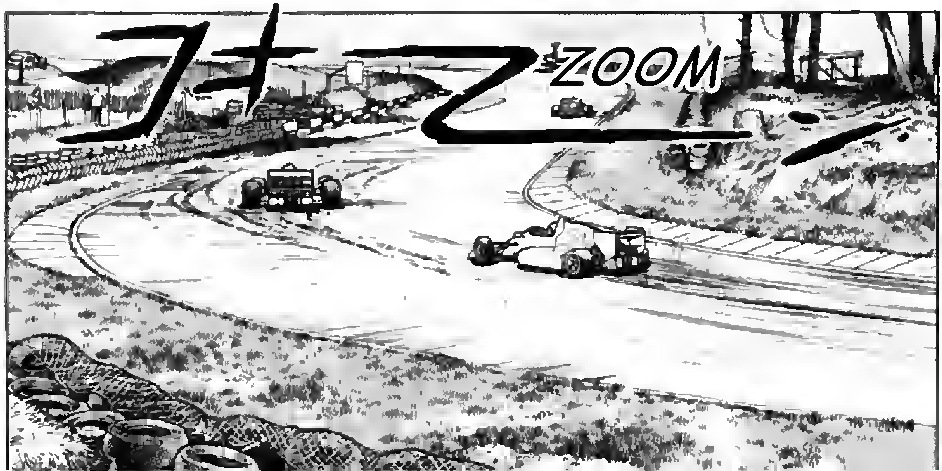

What a lovely day for cricket as we get started on this...

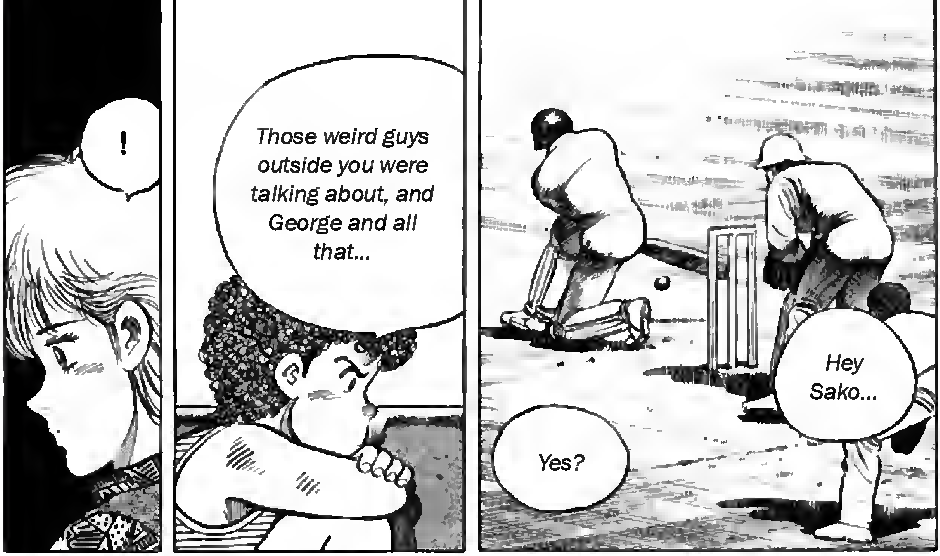



VAUXHALL
ONCE DRIVEN NEVER SMITTEN
Shell Unlead
Cars with a future
The bloody arm got bent out of shape from all that vibrating!
It'll take several minutes to change out everything!

Get those tires changed fast!
Ain't no way I'm givin' this up!

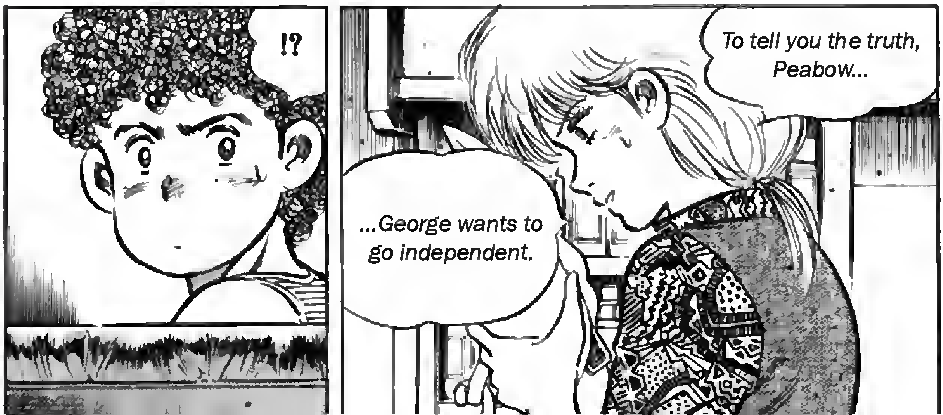

They said about 10 minutes!
How long is this gonna take!?


ZOOM

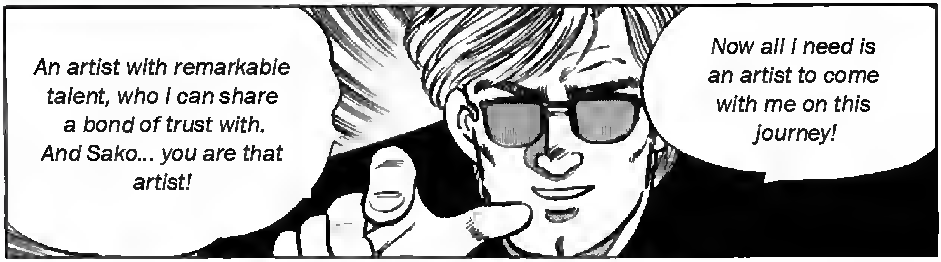

!
Those weird guys outside you were talking about, and George and all that...
Hey Sako...
Yes?

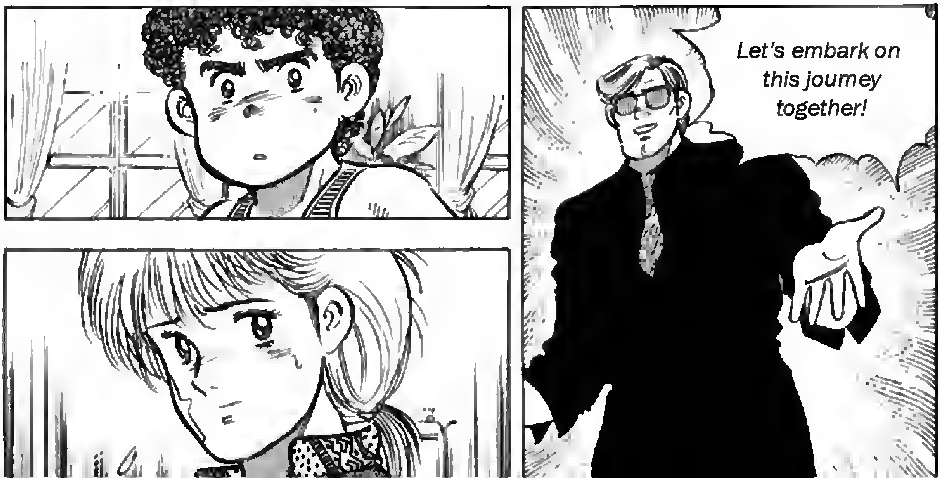
How come we have to live in secret, and what does George have to do with those reporters?
They must be some kind of reporters, right?
What's it all about?

I just think it's odd that we have to live in secret like this.
You've got hit music, and you're famous now.

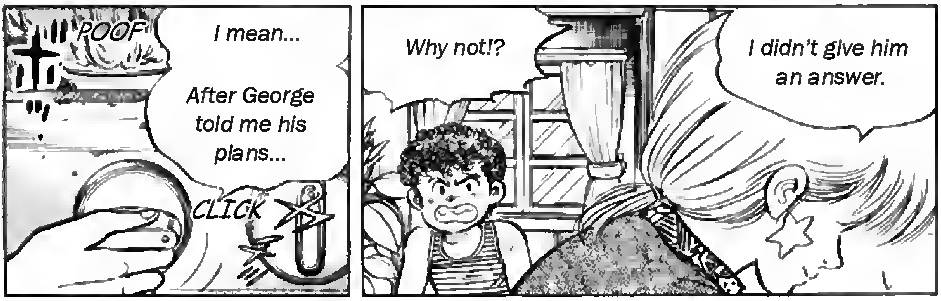

!?
To tell you the truth, Peabow...
...George wants to go independent.

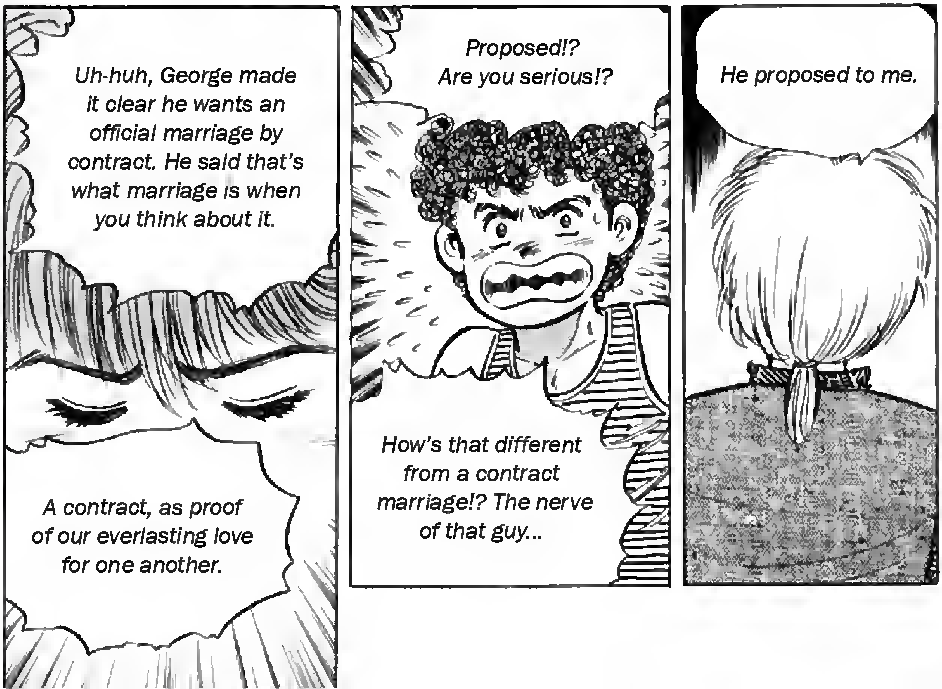
The time has come Sako. I've got enough production experience and recognition to move forward.
I also have adequate connections and enough capital to keep me afloat as an independent.
He wants to break away from ABC Records and start up his own production studio.
He told me this in secret, and it's been his dream for a long time.

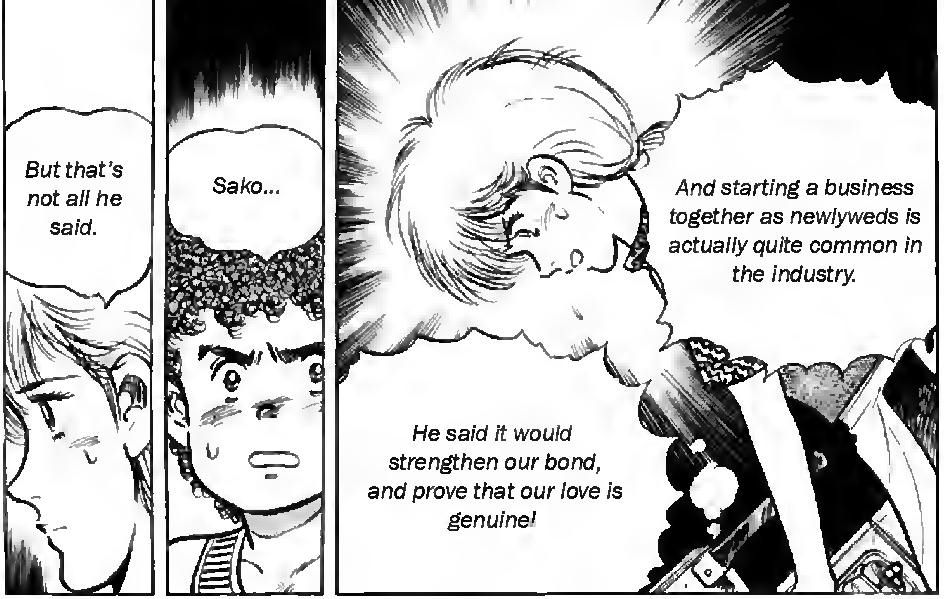

An artist with remarkable talent, who I can share a bond of trust with. And Sako... you are that artist!
Now all I need is an artist to come with me on this journey!

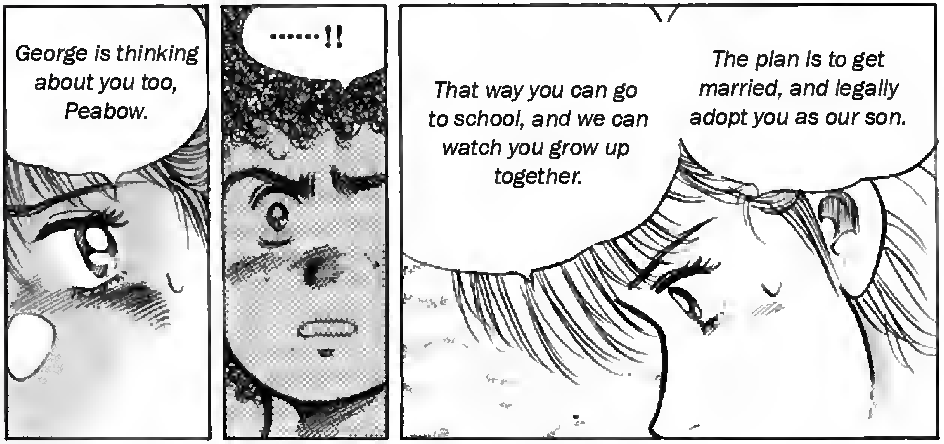

Let's embark on this journey together!

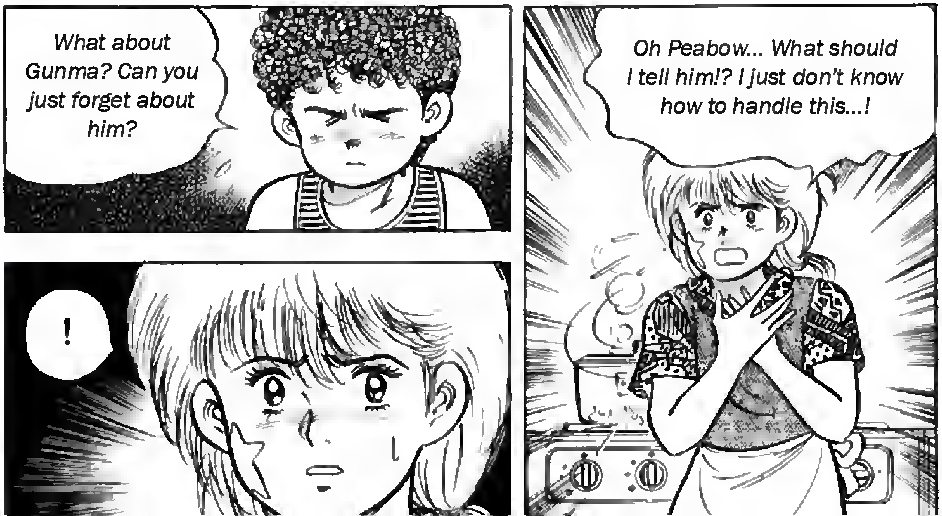
I'm sure you told him no, right?
Told him he's out of his mind?
A pawn?
But Sako...
It sounds like George is only using you as a pawn to get what he wants!


POOF
I mean...
After George told me his plans...
CLICK
Why not!?
I didn't give him an answer.

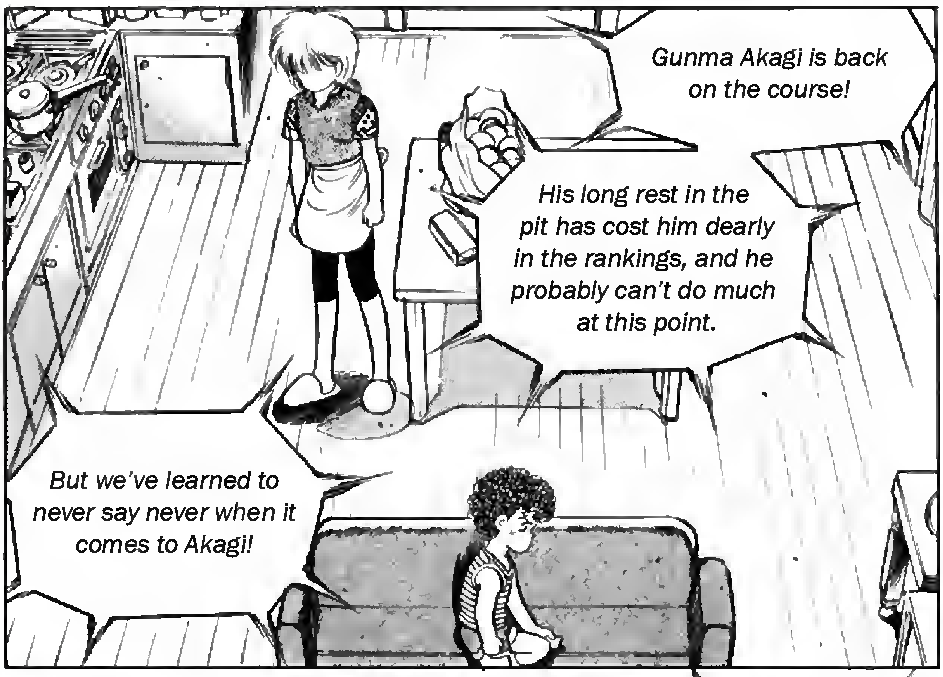

Uh-huh, George made it clear he wants an official marriage by contract. He said that's what marriage is when you think about it.
A contract, as proof of our everlasting love for one another.
Proposed!? Are you serious!?
How's that different from a contract marriage!? The nerve of that guy...
He proposed to me.


But that's not all he said.
Sako...
And starting a business together as newlyweds is actually quite common in the industry.
He said it would strengthen our bond, and prove that our love is genuine!

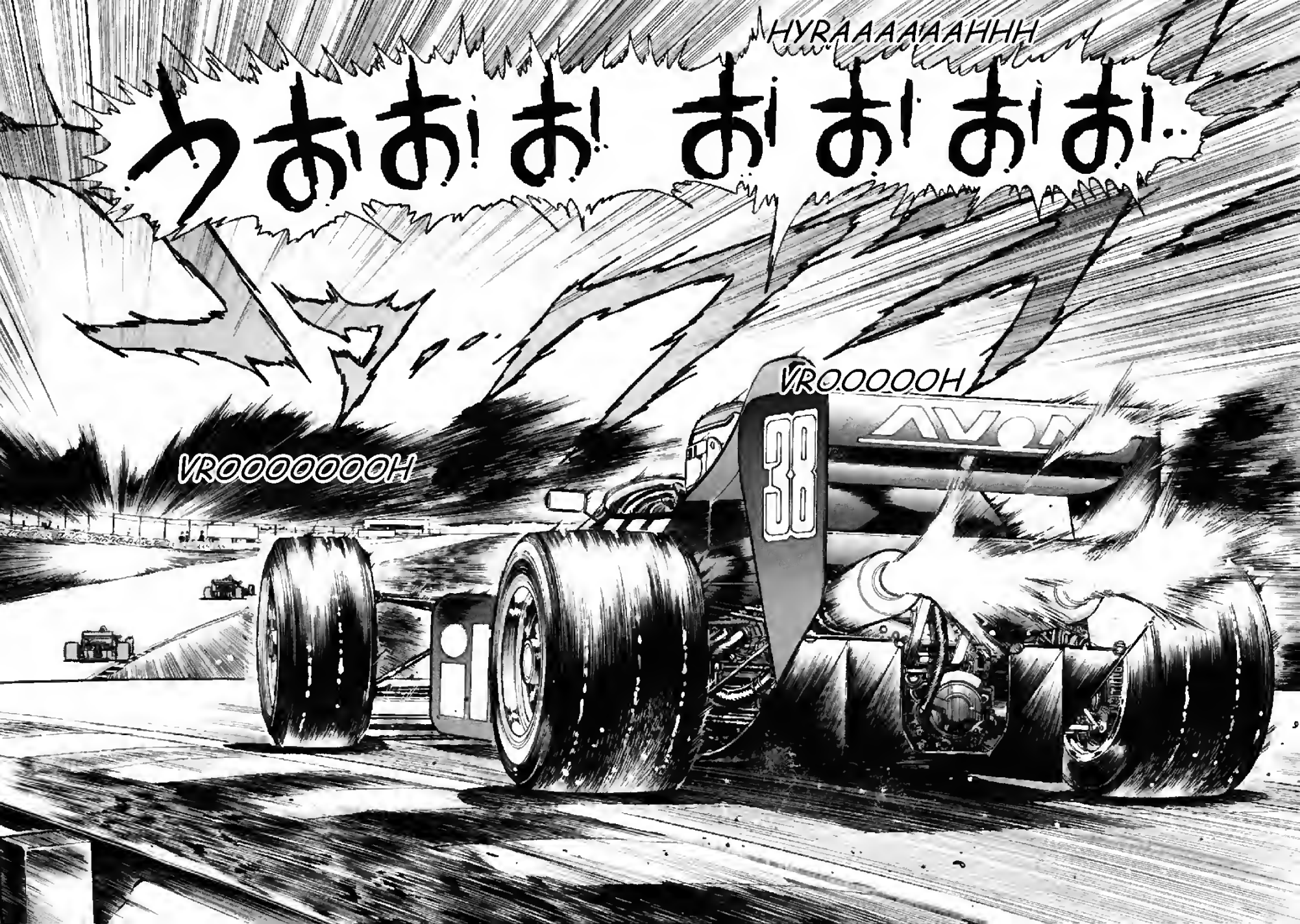

George is thinking about you too, Peabow.
.....!!
That way you can go to school, and we can watch you grow up together.
The plan is to get married, and legally adopt you as our son.


What about Gunma? Can you just forget about him?
!
Oh Peabow... What should I tell him!? I just don't know how to handle this...!

CLICK
I have to forget.

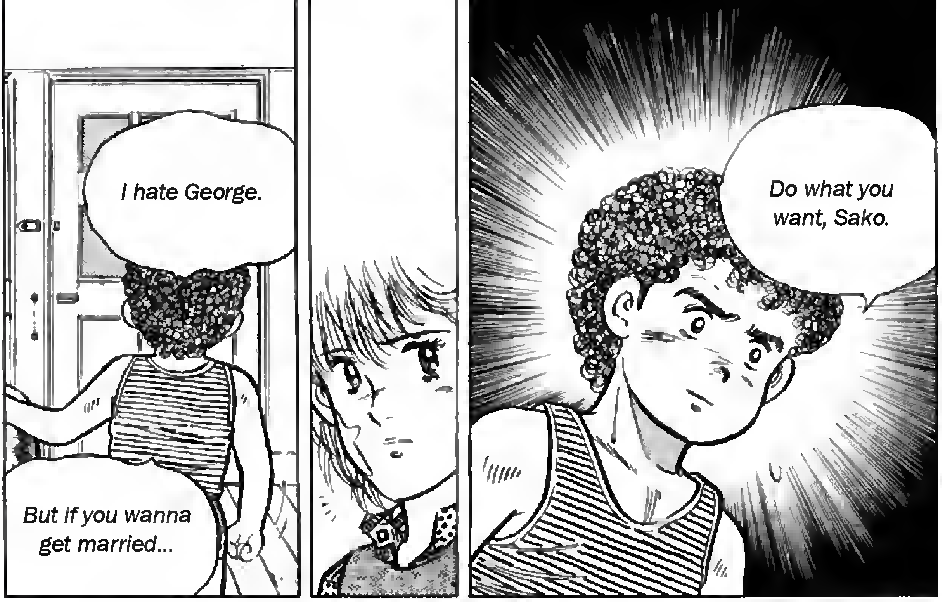

Gunma Akagi is back on the course!
His long rest in the pit has cost him dearly in the rankings, and he probably can't do much at this point.
But we've learned to never say never when it comes to Akagi!

BREHHHHHH
Don't count him out!

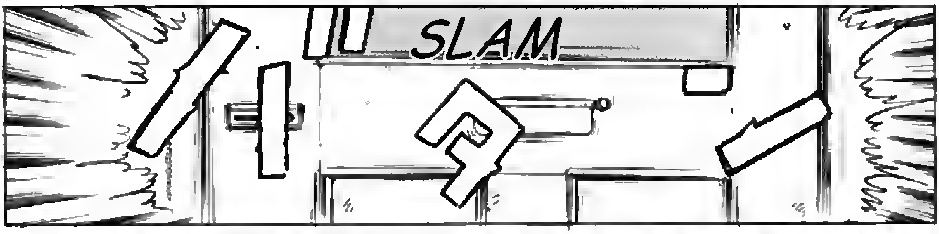

HYRAAAAAAHHH
うおお! お! おお!..
VROOOOOH
VROOOOOOOH
38
AVON

HYRAAAAAAHHH
おおおお…
VROOOOOH
38
AVON

うおお!お!
VROOOOOOOH


I hate George.
But if you wanna get married...
Do what you want, Sako.

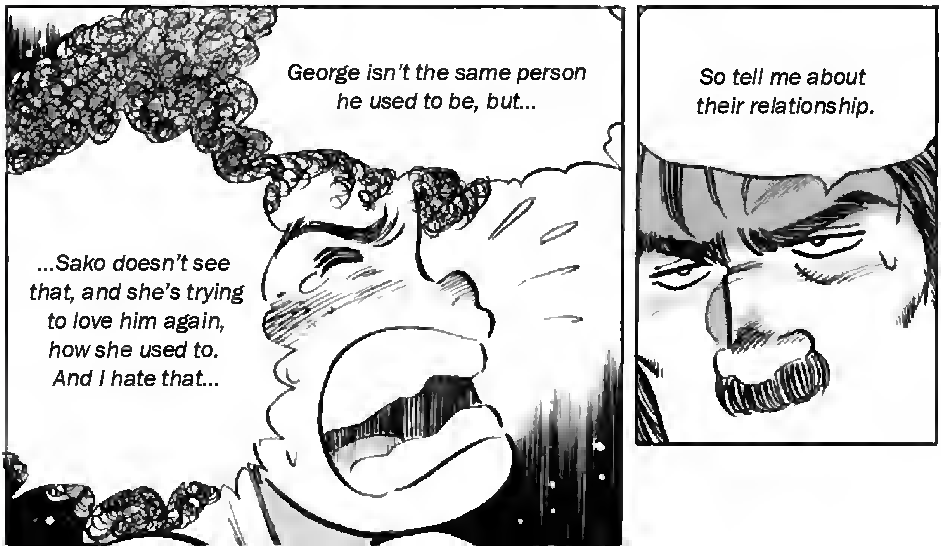
Peabow.
...then get married for all I care!
SWOOSH


SLAM

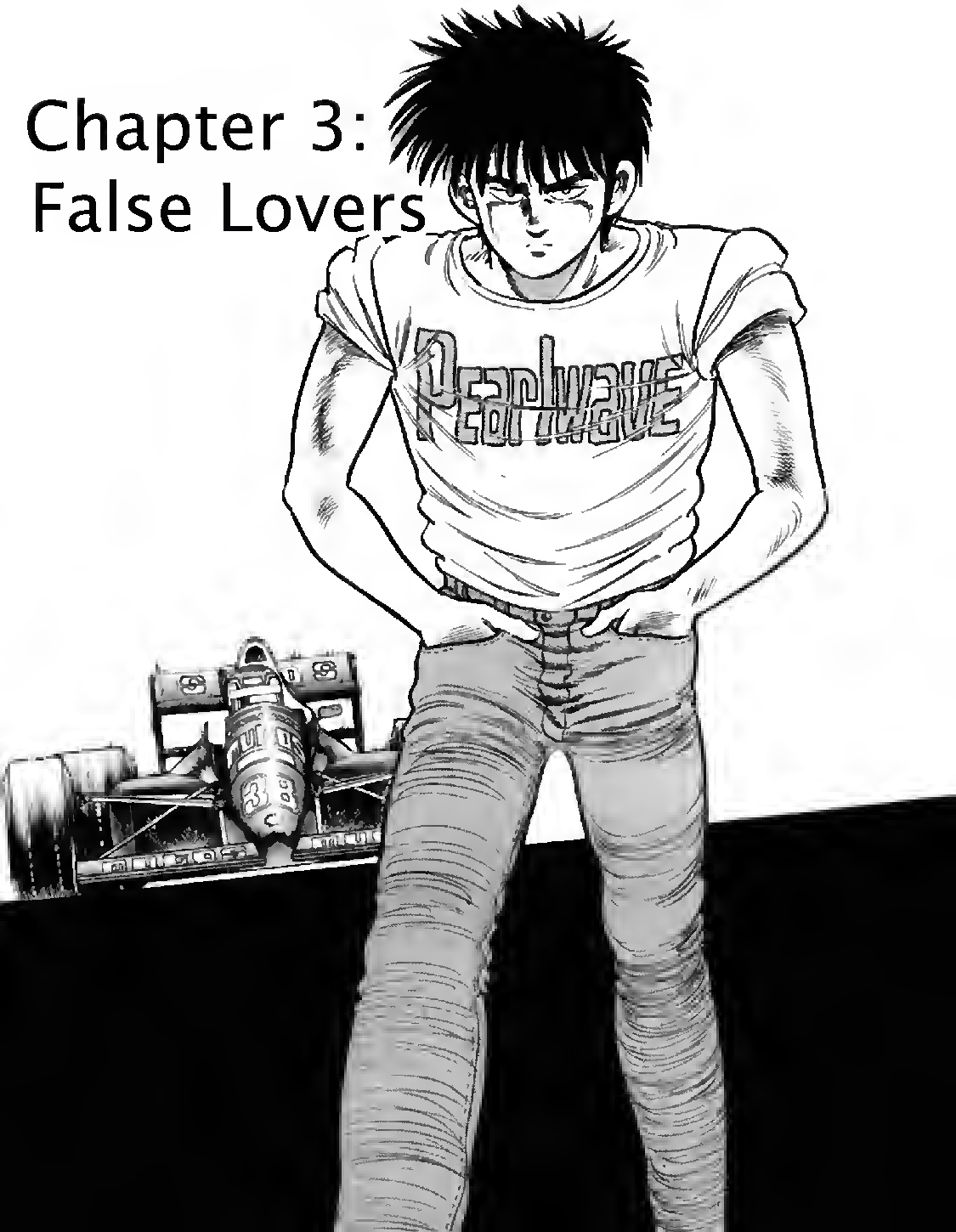
Peabow...
Dammit.
Dammit.
Dammit.
What an interesting development.
THUNK
HUFF!!?
!!?HUFF
Let go of me!
Come on, you've got no reason to run.
Just wait a bit.
You forgot your ball, lad.
SWOOSH

I want to know how George and Sako are getting along.
There's nothing to talk about.
You must know, lad. So let's hear it!
I found Sako's house, and saw you running from it.
I'm not gonna hurt you. I just have some questions, that's all. Let's try to calm down.

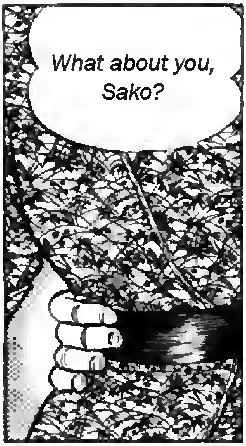
The president of ABC Records is furious, and if those two are planning something behind his back...
...they have no future in the music industry!
This is very important. If no one acts, there will be dire consequences!


George isn't the same person he used to be, but...
...Sako doesn't see that, and she's trying to love him again, how she used to. And I hate that...
So tell me about their relationship.

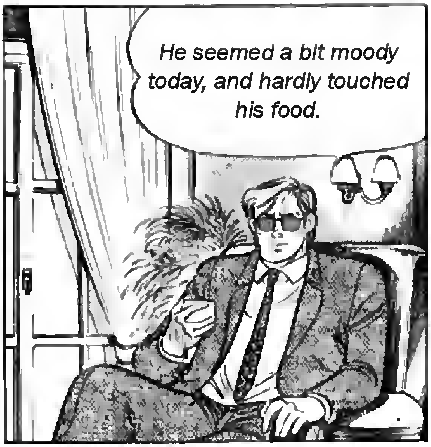
Chapter 3: False Lovers



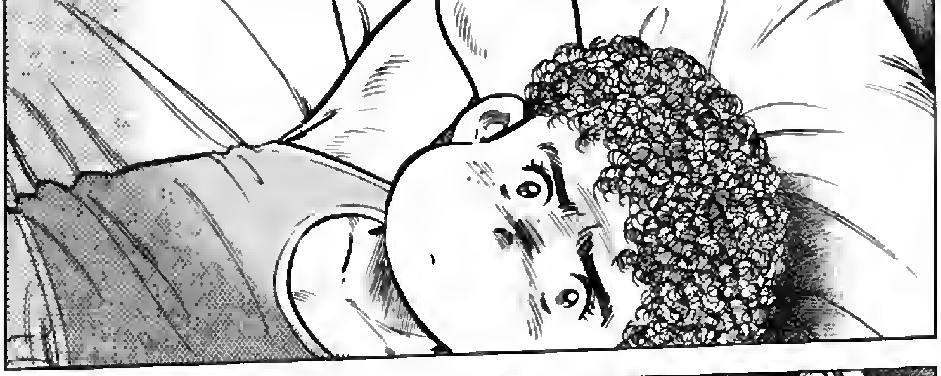
Has Peabow gone to bed already?
Delicious. You're a gifted cook as well.

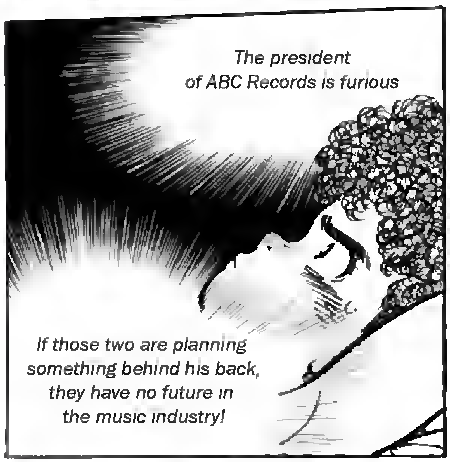

What about you, Sako?

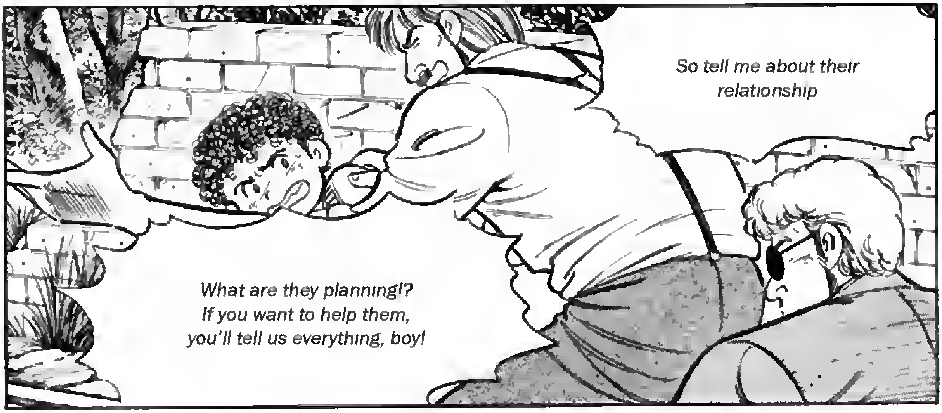
He's still confused about you. He's not sure how to act.

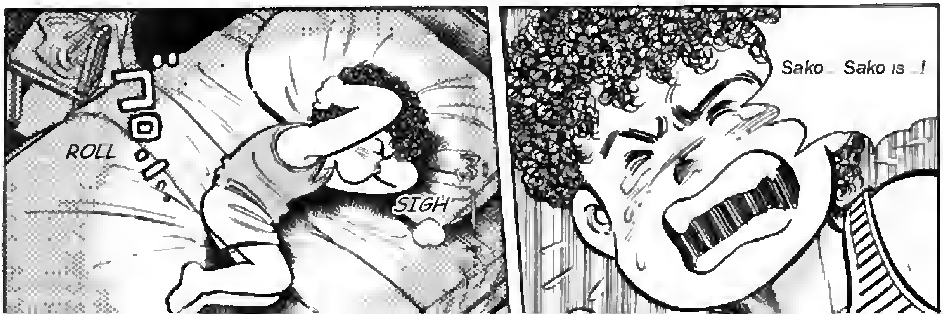

He seemed a bit moody today, and hardly touched his food.

George...
Are you confused about me as well?




The president of ABC Records is furious
If those two are planning something behind his back, they have no future in the music industry!

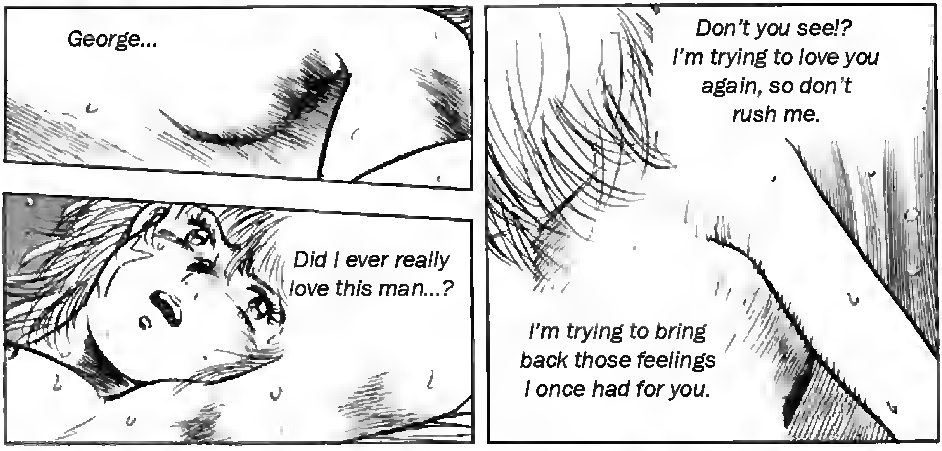

So tell me about their relationship
What are they planning!? If you want to help them, you'll tell us everything, boy!

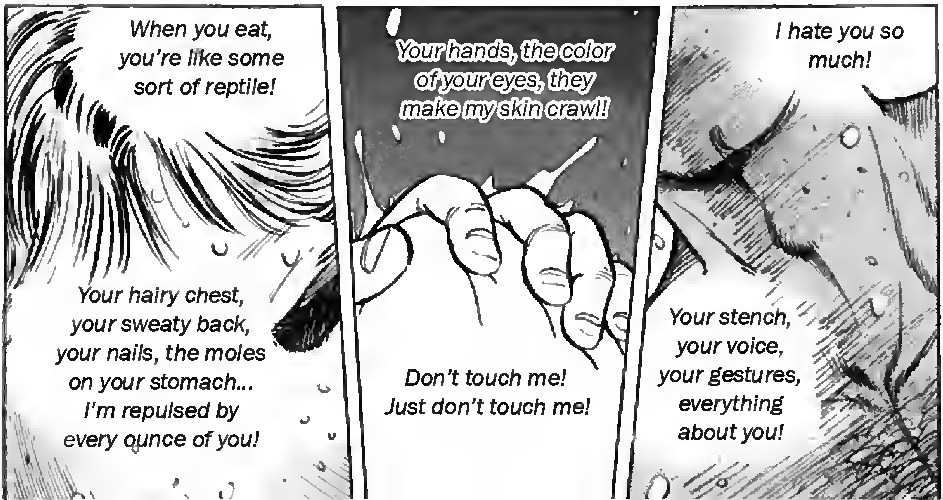

ROLL
SIGH
Sako... Sako is...!

That's not it. You're the one on my mind.
You really are, but I need time to think. Just a bit more time, please...
Don't "think," Sako... Just feel!
Can't get that other man out of your mind? Is that it!?
George, wait...
Please stop... I'm not ready... And Peabow is still awake...

I don't want this right now!
Please let me think! Please!
CLUNK
Geor...
You're a bothersome little thing, aren't you...

Please stop... I want to love you if I can...
So please stop.
George...


George...
Did I ever really love this man...?
Don't you see!? I'm trying to love you again, so don't rush me.
I'm trying to bring back those feelings I once had for you.


When you eat, you're like some sort of reptile!
Your hairy chest, your sweaty back, your nails, the moles on your stomach... I'm repulsed by every ounce of you!
Your hands, the color of your eyes, they make my skin crawl!
Don't touch me! Just don't touch me!
I hate you so much!
Your stench, your voice, your gestures, everything about you!

Don't touch me...
...you monster...

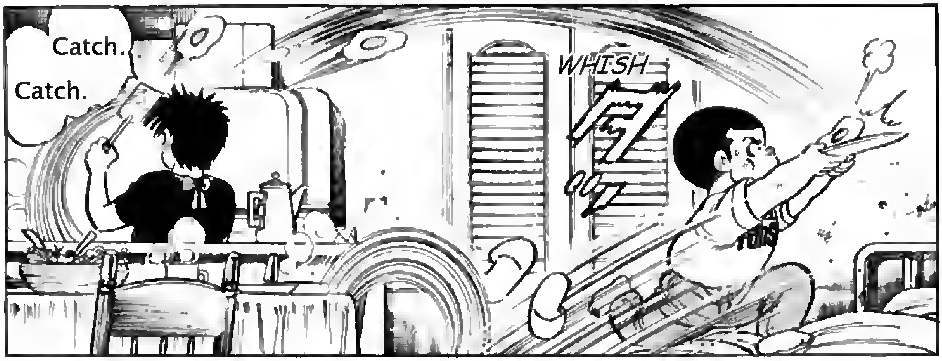
Don’t touch me...

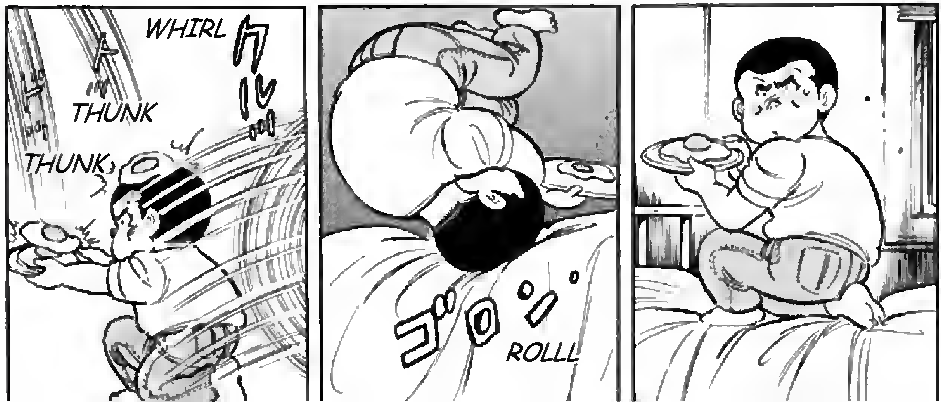
...you monster...

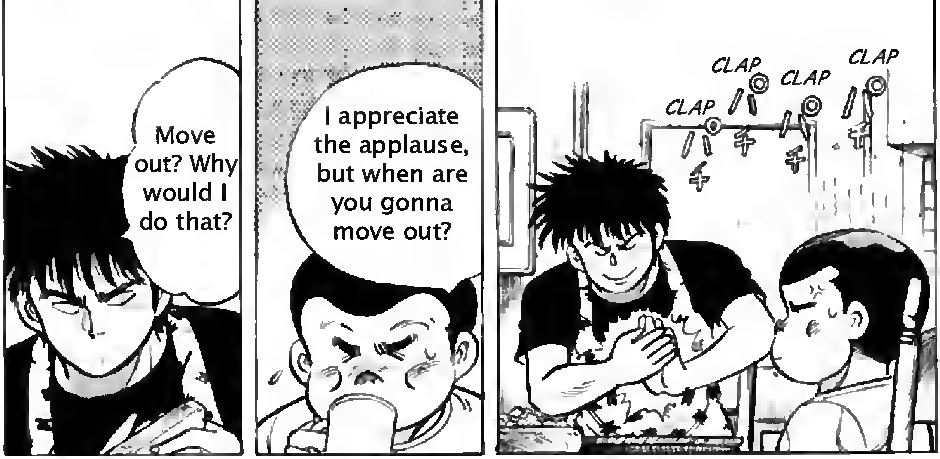
The contract won't be an issue.
The one you signed before isn't between you and ABC Records, it's between you and me.
Technically, I'm not even employed by them. The system has me taking all the risk to scout new talent.
But if we put out one or two songs, and ABC Records approves them...
...I sign a new contract, and it changes to a contract between you and them.
isn't that outrageous? They're risk free, while I'm forced to make all the risky decisions myself.
Then they snatch the talent away from me once it's been proven.
SHAAP
But not this time.

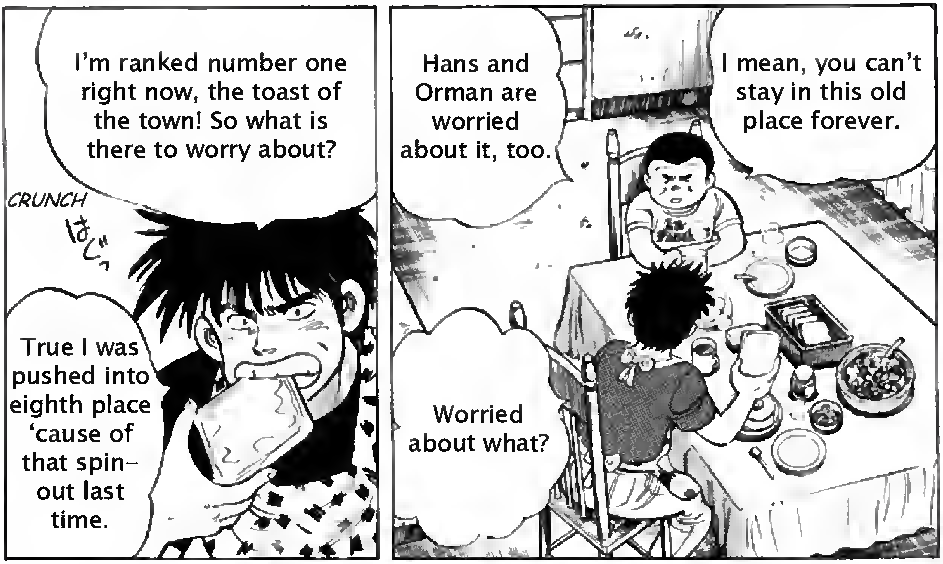
...
What about Peabow?
I own you! Your talent, your body, it's all mine!
I won't let them take you away!
He really does need a father.
I'll raise him as my own, put him in school.
He's just pouting. In two or three months he'll be calling me "Dad."
Leave that to me! Peabow and I used to get along great, after all.
My music is all I need to get by.
All I want to do is sing...
You're wrong, Sako!

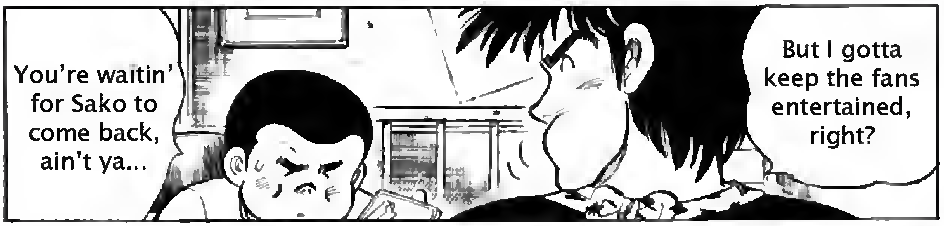
...you like 'em sunny-side up, do ya?
So...
Catch.

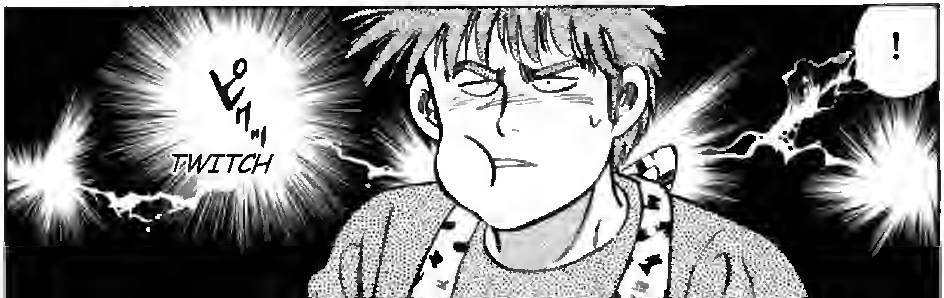

Catch.
Catch.
WHISH


WHIRL
THUNK
THUNK
ROLLL


Move out? Why would I do that?
I appreciate the applause, but when are you gonna move out?
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP


I'm ranked number one right now, the toast of the town! So what is there to worry about?
CRUNCH
True I was pushed into eighth place 'cause of that spin-out last time.
Hans and Orman are worried about it, too.
I mean, you can't stay in this old place forever.
Worried about what?

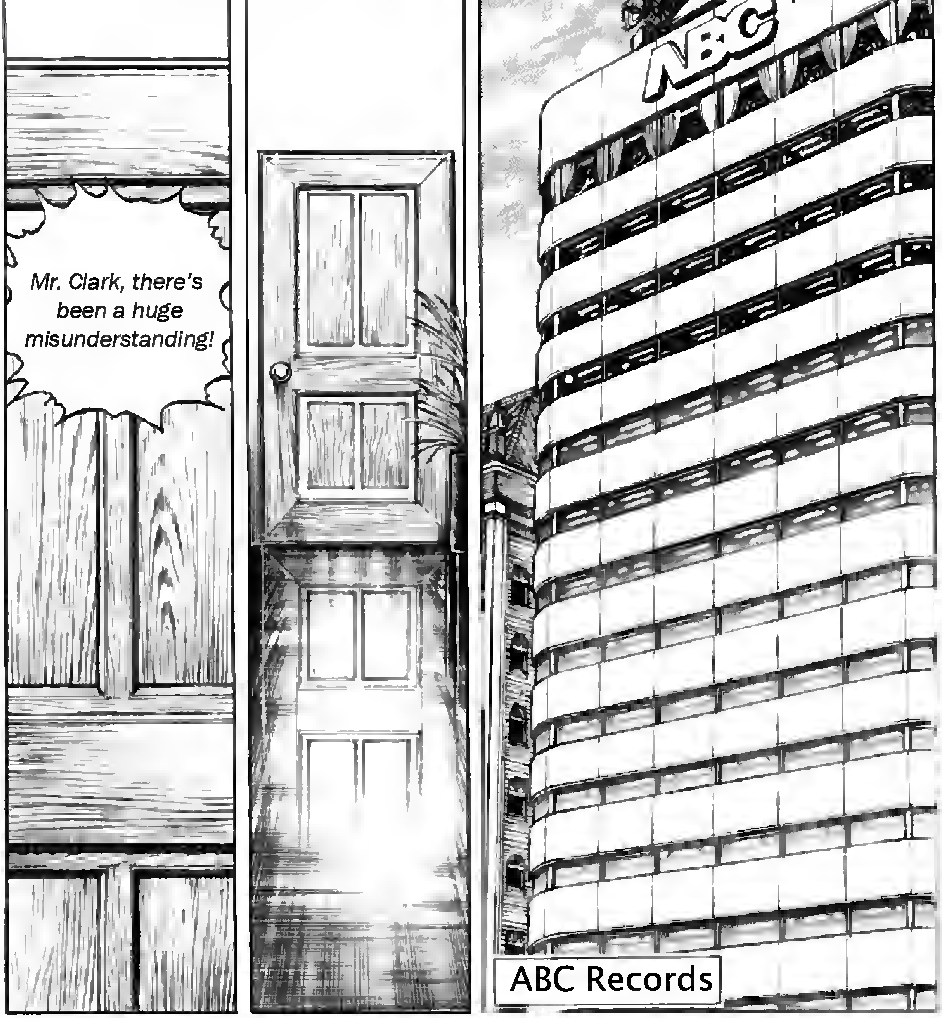

You're waitin' for Sako to come back, ain't ya...
But I gotta keep the fans entertained, right?

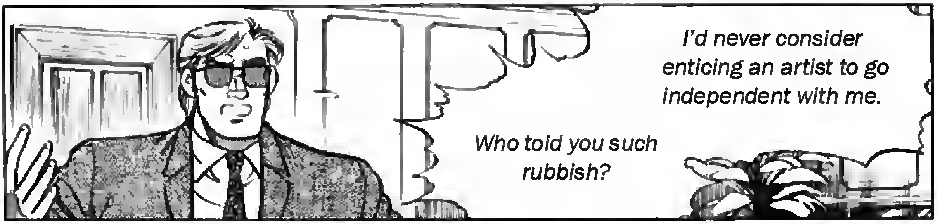

TWITCH
!

You plan on living here for the rest of your life?
Then think about it, Gunma!
What?
I'm not waiting for her.
Eat yer damn eggs!
I don't wanna talk about it!
That spin-out in the last race wasn't like you at all.
When you're thinkin' about Sako on the course, it could cause you to crash.
This will affect your driving.
I hate to say this, but you gotta get Sako out of your head, for good.
That's what everybody's really worried about. Can't you see?
You probably can't understand that.
This apart-ment's sort of a landmark to me.
How do I put it...
Tamo-tsu.

...she probably won't ever come back.
That letter she left was serious... I know it.
And I know she ain't interested in fixing things with me.
With me, Peabow, herself, her music, the racin', Peabow's future, all cluttered up in her head, she decided to leave.
I'll bet...
Sako had so much on her mind.
'Cause she's a nice girl.
But I'll do the same thing to the racin' world, all the way up to F1! All over the world!
Busy with concerts all over the world.
She's gonna take the music world by storm.
...
HA HA HA
Then before you know it, we'll be like lost children.
It'll flow on like a muddy river, as everything goes downstream.
But time's gonna pass as we go through all this.

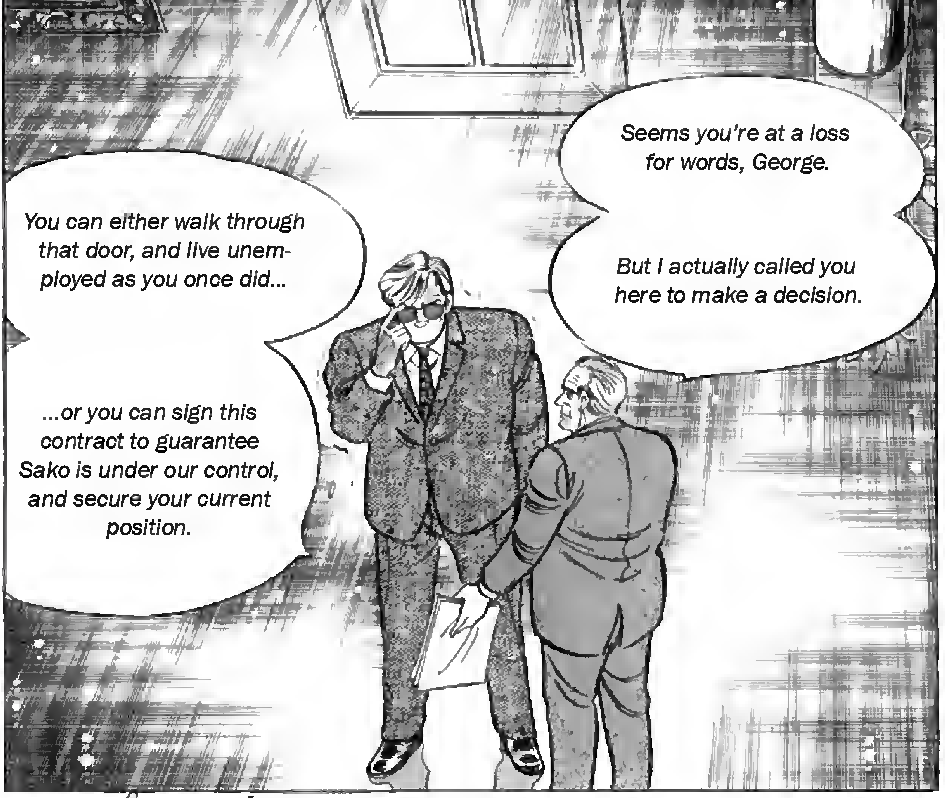
...for a long, long time?
So you're sayin' this apartment is a landmark for lost children, wandering through this maze we call life...
We get confused, wonderin' what we're doing, where we are, how we got here...
You know what I mean?
If we're lost, we can always come back here. The arrow always points in one direction!
That's my drift. First Granny's apartment in Suginami, and now this old run-down place...
You got a nice way of puttin' things, Tamotsu.
I know how you feel.
If that's what you think, I won't say nothin' else.
I think I get it.
MUNCH MUNCH もぐもぐ
Right ...
I ain't the punk kid I used to be. I'm only focused on racing now.
Don't worry, Tamotsu!
MUNCH
MUNCH

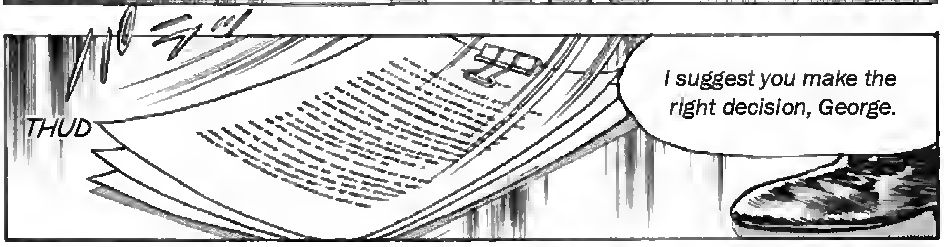

Mr. Clark, there's been a huge misunderstanding!
NBC
ABC Records

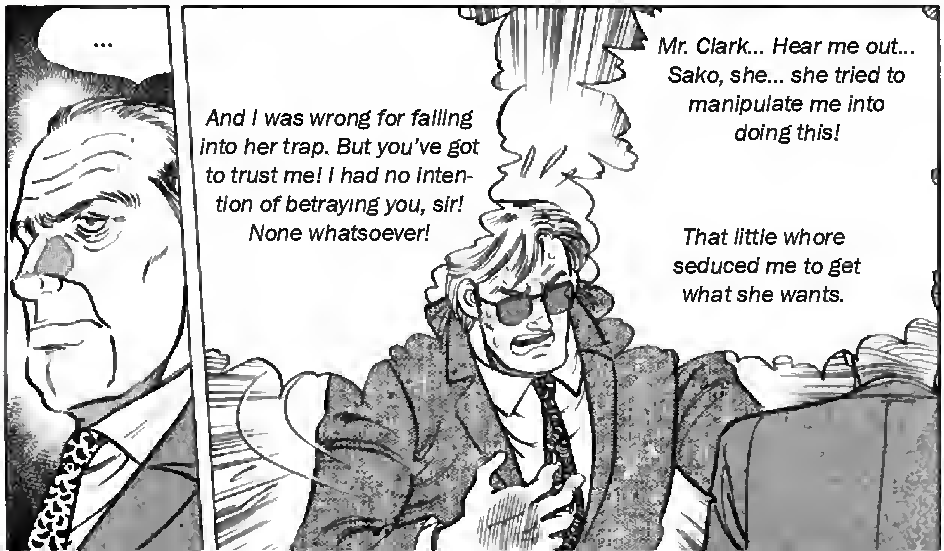

I'd never consider enticing an artist to go independent with me.
Who told you such rubbish?

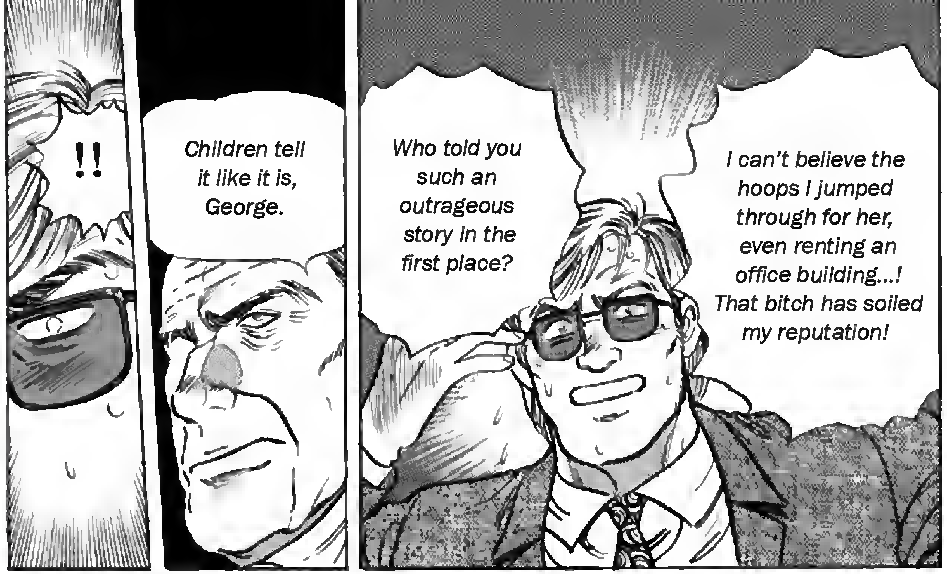
I've done the research, so don't bother lying about it.
Please wait a moment, Mr. Clark!

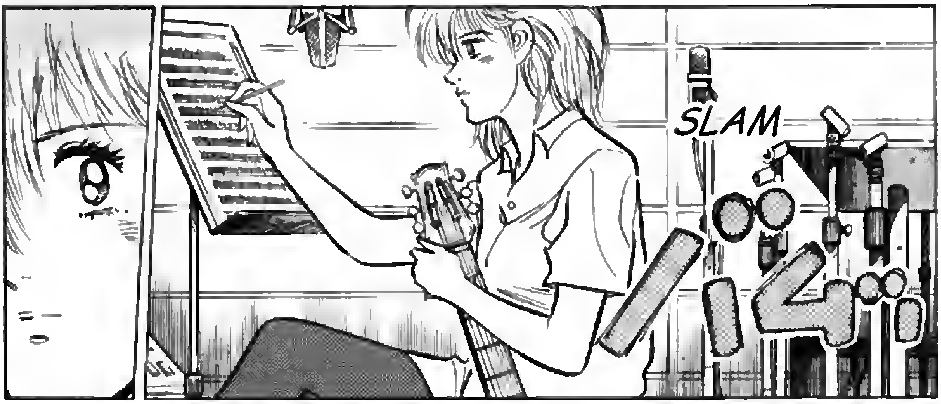
Unfortunately for you, your plan will never come to fruition, no matter how long I wait.
Now you're asking me to wait? For how long?
How long do I wait before your plan is 100% complete?
!?
Dh yes, and we bought up the building you were hoping to take for your office, for twice what it's worth.
Don't screw with ABC Records, George. We've already taken care of everything.
The staff members you were hoping would join you are all gone.
You've been banned from entering any studios, concert halls, TV stations, or radio stations.
SHIVER
SHIVER
SHIVER
And don't even think about crawling your way to another record company. This industry avoids desperate upstarts like the bloody plague, and we've made sure of that in your case.
...

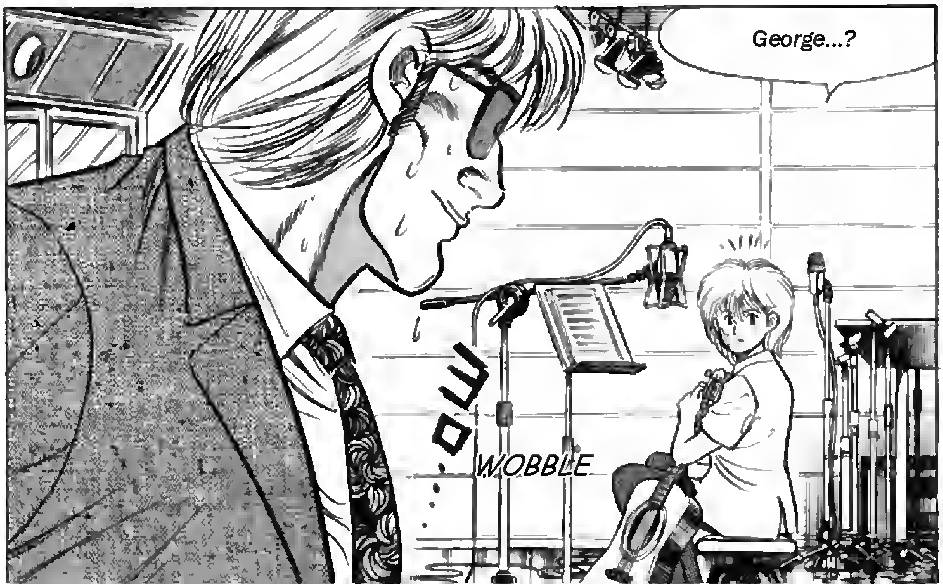

Seems you're at a loss for words, George.
But I actually called you here to make a decision.
You can either walk through that door, and live unemployed as you once did...
...or you can sign this contract to guarantee Sako is under our control, and secure your current position.


THUD
I suggest you make the right decision, George.

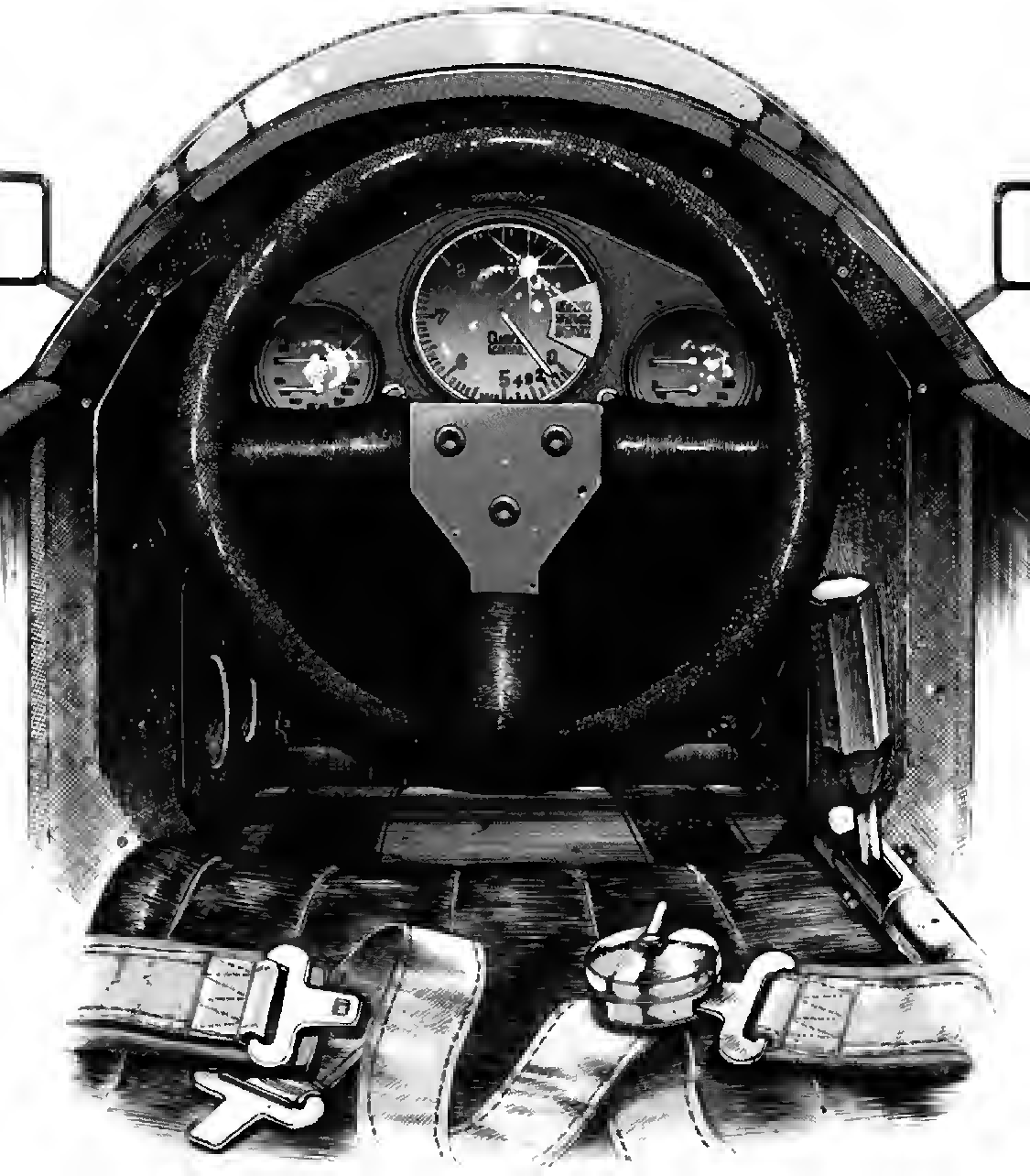

...
Mr. Clark... Hear me out... Sako, she... she tried to manipulate me into doing this!
And I was wrong for falling into her trap. But you've got to trust me! I had no intention of betraying you, sir! None whatsoever!
That little whore seduced me to get what she wants.

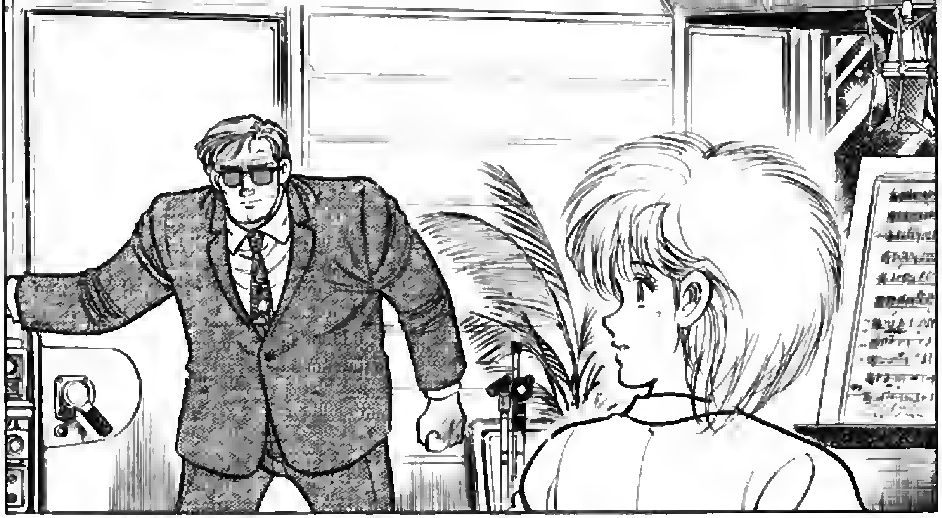

!!
Children tell it like it is, George.
Who told you such an outrageous story in the first place?
I can't believe the hoops I jumped through for her, even renting an office building...! That bitch has soiled my reputation!

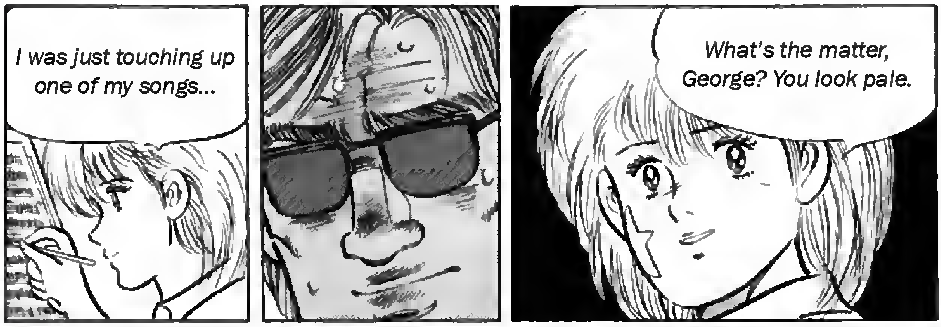

SLAM


George...?
WOBBLE

Chapter 4:
Playing House



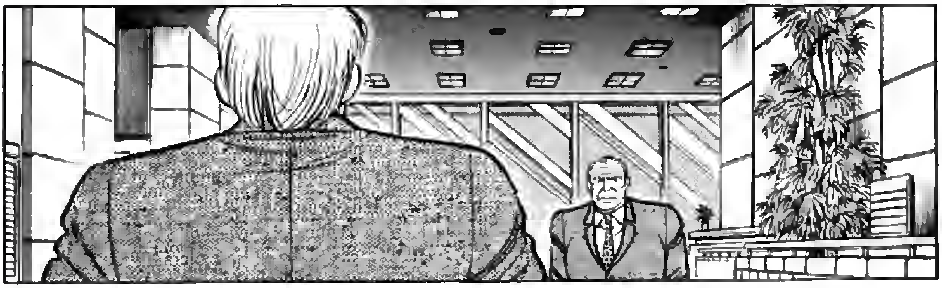



I was just touching up one of my songs...
What's the matter, George? You look pale.

Okay, go ahead and take it from the top.
Could you step out, George?
I think I've got it.
How's it going, Sako?

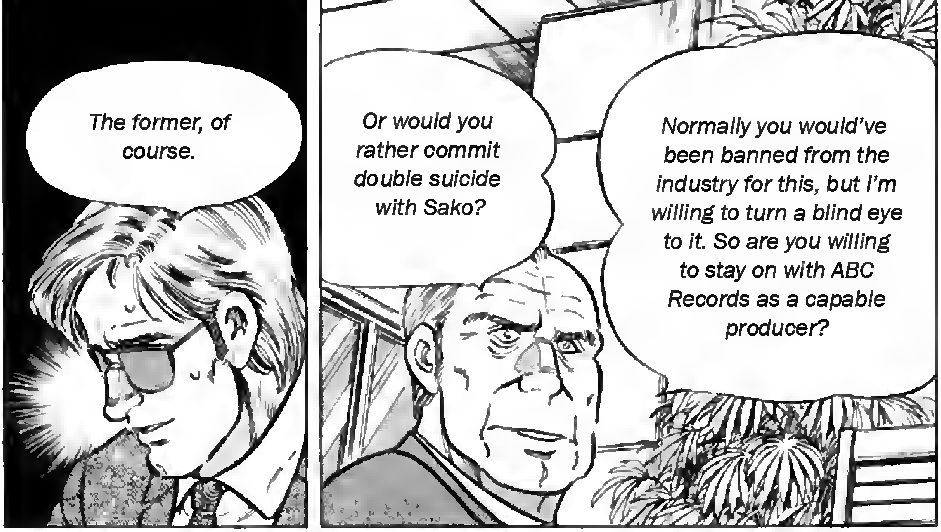
Oh...
George!

Let's talk later, George.
Right.

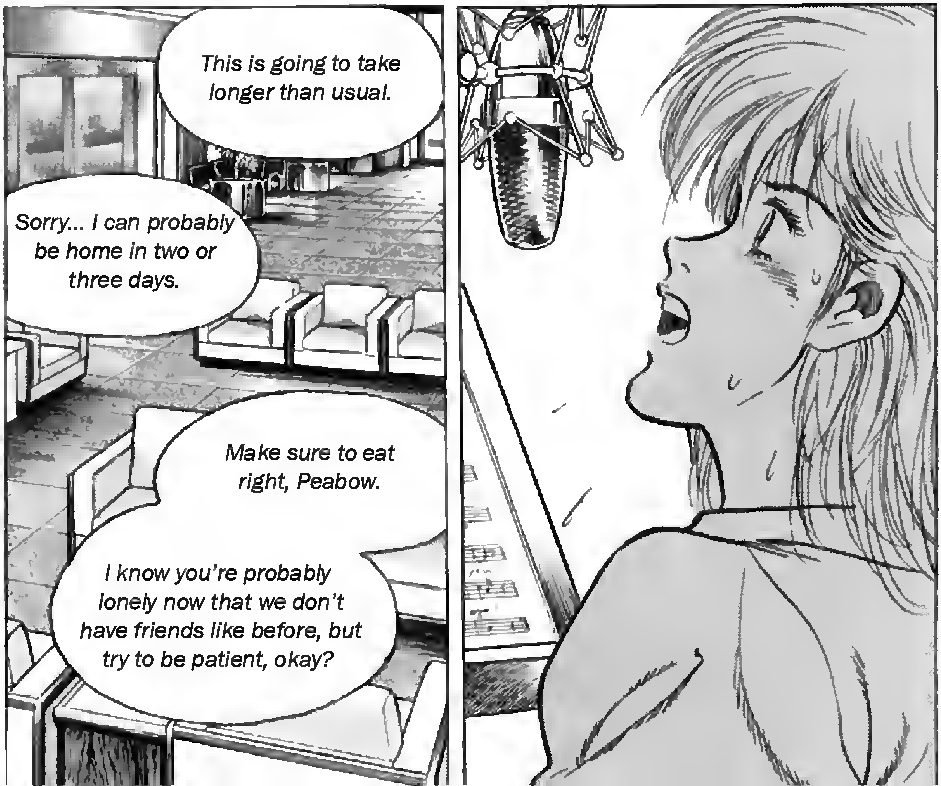


Ready to sign?

Abandon your unrealistic ambitions, George!
You've built a solid reputation as a talented producer, and to throw it all away because of this little incident, seems like such a waste.
Mr. Clark...

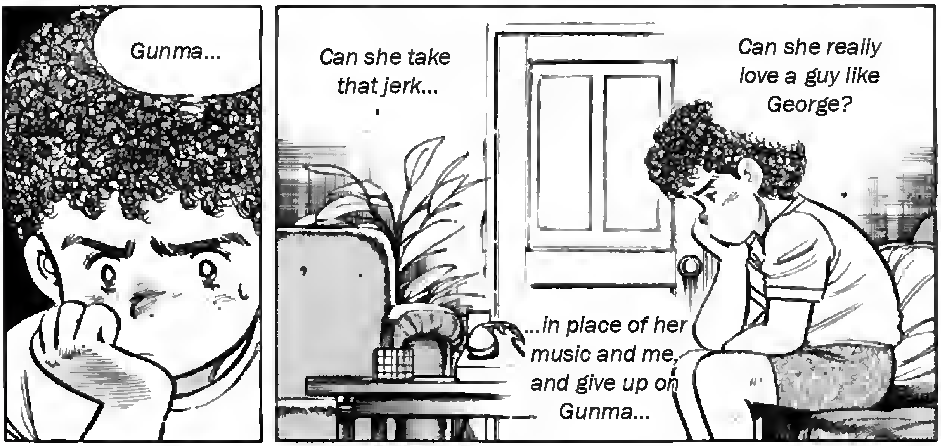

The former, of course.
Or would you rather commit double suicide with Sako?
Normally you would've been banned from the industry for this, but I'm willing to turn a blind eye to it. So are you willing to stay on with ABC Records as a capable producer?

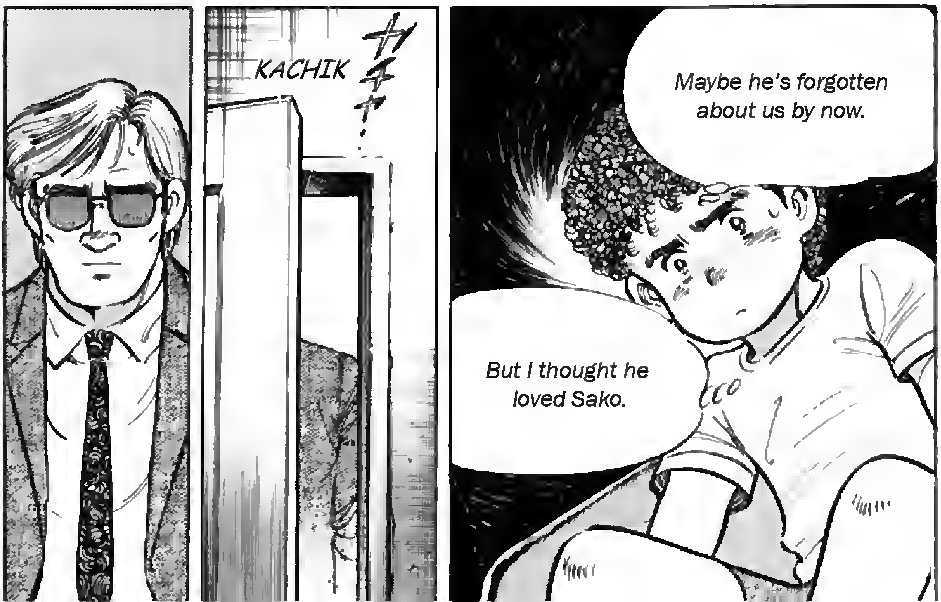
Very good!

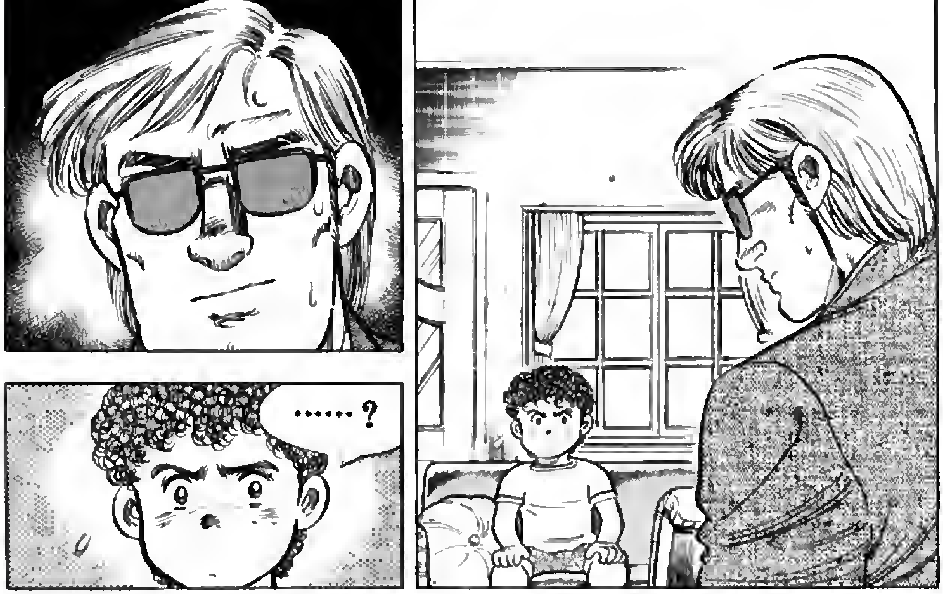

This is going to take longer than usual.
Sorry... I can probably be home in two or three days.
Make sure to eat right, Peabow.
I know you're probably lonely now that we don't have friends like before, but try to be patient, okay?

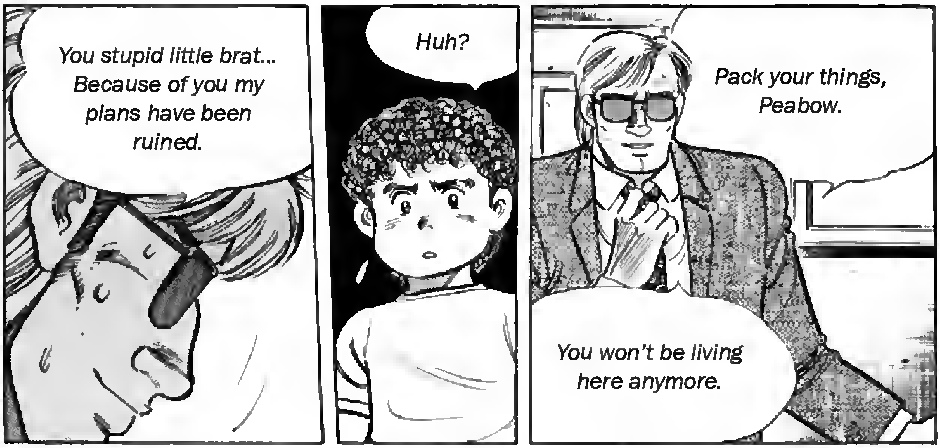
Yeah, yeah...
George is the dad, and you're the mom...
Before you know it, we'll get you into a school...
...and you can make all sorts of friends there. Are you listening?
I don't like your tone.
You're being sarcastic.
...and we all live happily ever after...
...and I become your adopted son, so the sad little orphan boy is saved...
What is it you're so hung up about? If you've got something to say, say it now!
CLICK
Anyway, you be a good kid till I get back, okay? And be sure to eat right!
Whatever you're fine with, I can live with it.
Just as long as you and me are together, Sako.

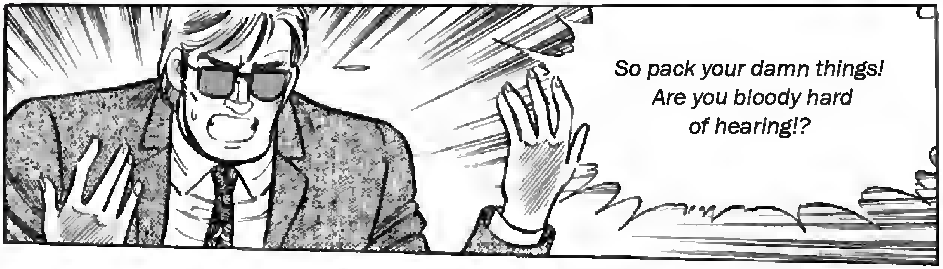
...


Gunma...
Can she take that jerk...
Can she really love a guy like George?
...in place of her music and me, and give up on Gunma...


KACHIK
Maybe he's forgotten about us by now.
But I thought he loved Sako.


……?

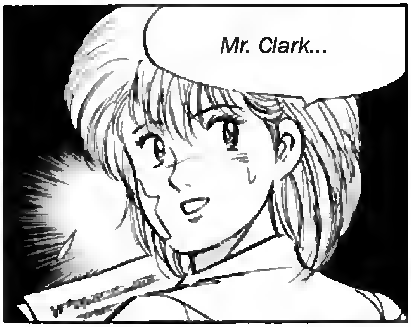

You stupid little brat... Because of you my plans have been ruined.
Huh?
Pack your things, Peabow.
You won't be living here anymore.

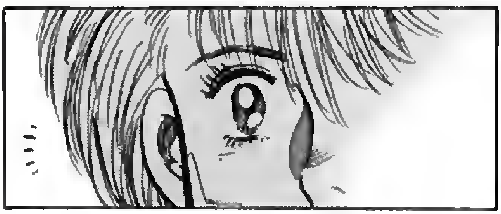

So pack your damn things! Are you bloody hard of hearing!?

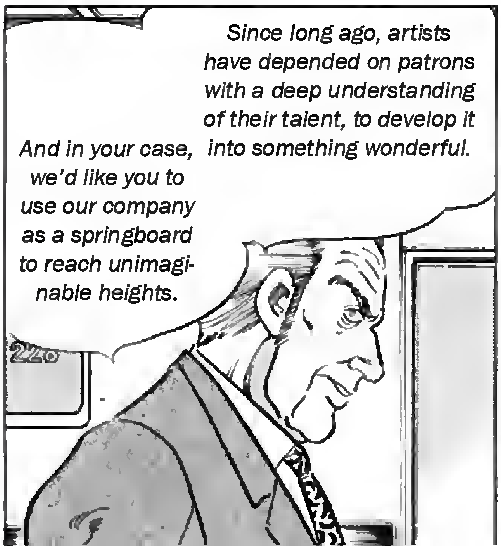
……!?

Hello, Sako.
How've you been doing?

You've become incredibly popular, you know.
And we're counting on your next album.

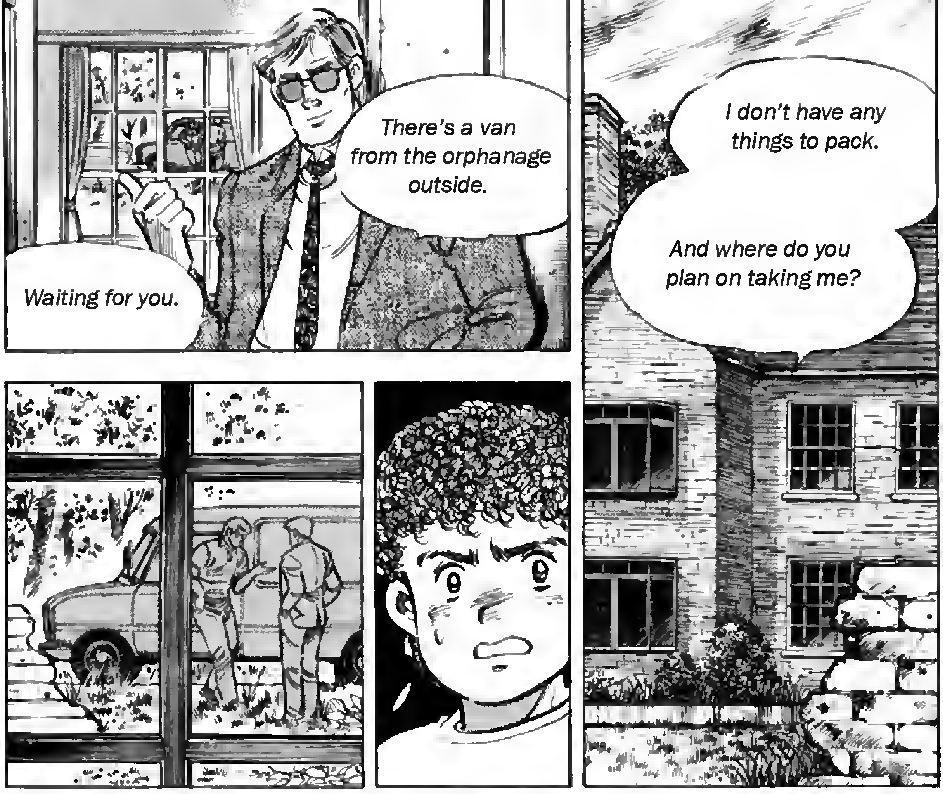

Mr. Clark...



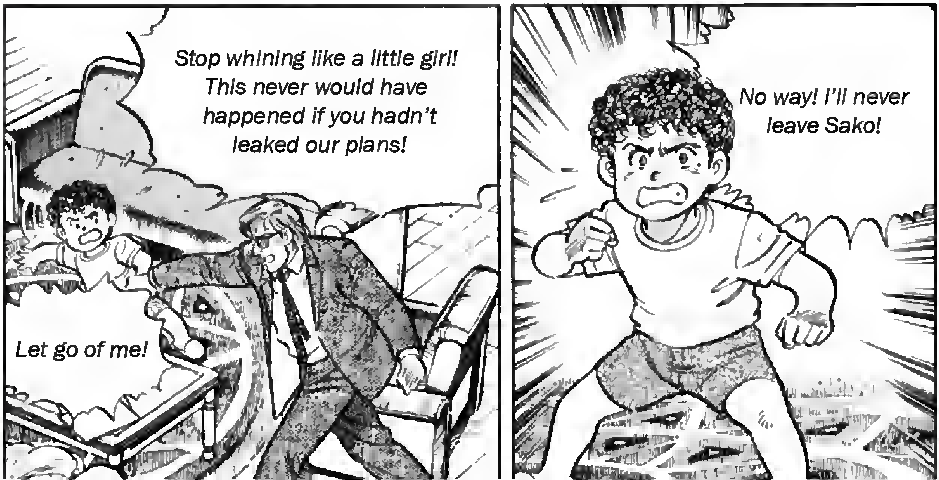

Since long ago, artists have depended on patrons with a deep understanding of their talent, to develop it into something wonderful.
And in your case, we'd like you to use our company as a springboard to reach unimaginable heights.

Yes, sir.
I just got the OK from George, and we've officially drawn up a direct contract between you and ABC Records.

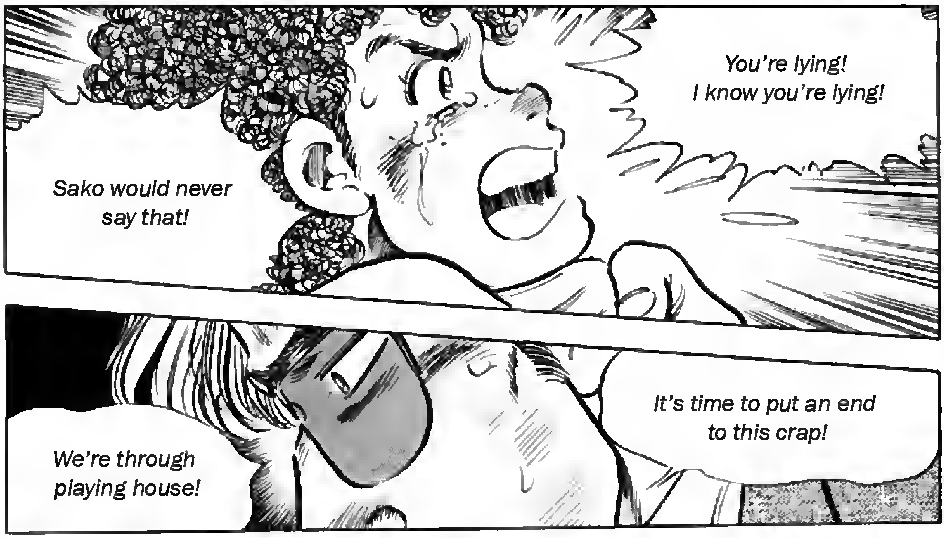
And by the way, all sorts of rumors are floating around regarding your relationship with George.
Indeed he did.
George signed it!?
I never had any...
But he says he wants to start over with you, to wipe the slate clean. So I hope you don't get any silly ideas, and just stick to your singing.
All right, my dear?
I hope you understand. Ha ha ha...
I plan on introducing him to my niece, and eventually giving him an executive position here.
...


There's a van from the orphanage outside.
Waiting for you.
I don't have any things to pack.
And where do you plan on taking me?

Thanks to your bloody shenanigans my plans are ruined, and Sako belongs exclusively to ABC Records now.
Having a child like you around would lower her market value.


Stop whining like a little girl! This never would have happened if you hadn't leaked our plans!
Let go of me!
No way! I'll never leave Sako!

Of course she does. She said it's a tremendous weight off her shoulders!
Does Sako know about this?
About putting me in an orphanage?
GRIP
You'll take responsibility for your actions!


You're lying! I know you're lying!
Sako would never say that!
It's time to put an end to this crap!
We're through playing house!

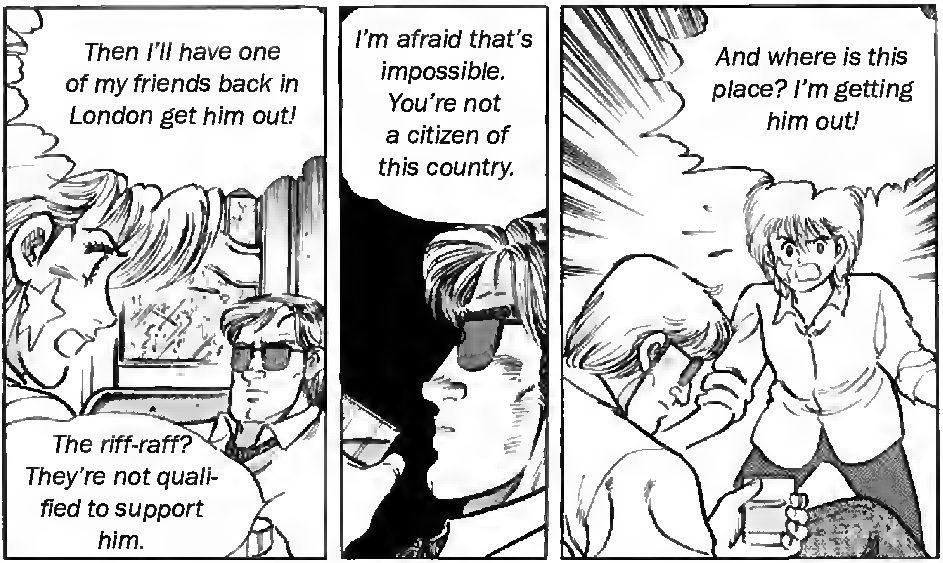
You liar!

SLAM
ゴゥゴゥ…
KROOOM
IRRK
KACHUK
Peabow...
He's not asleep.
Peabow.
Where are you?
Asleep already?
George...

...
Where'd he go!?
He left. He's taken responsibility for ruining our plans.
Left!?
WOBBLE
It's all over. ABC Records already has a contract with you.
His big mouth is the reason Clark found out about my plans to go Independent.
They took measures faster than I could blink.
Where is Peabow!?
I heard about that from Clark, and I was worried about how pale you looked so I came home.
The...
The orphanage. It's what's best for him.

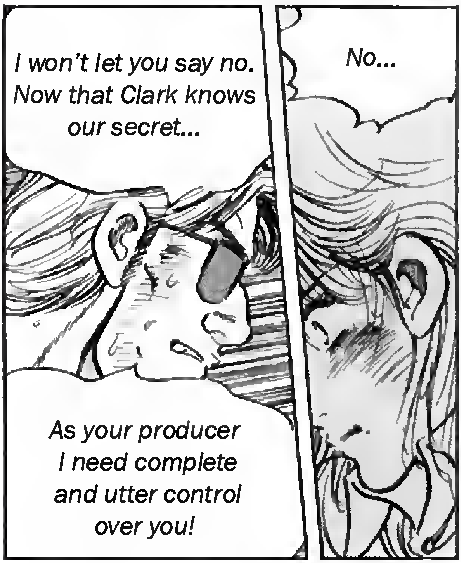
KAKROOM
FLASH
Orphanage!?

What have you done to that poor boy?
PITTER
PATTER
PATTER
PITTER


Then I'll have one of my friends back in London get him out!
The riff-raff? They're not qualified to support him.
I'm afraid that's impossible. You're not a citizen of this country.
And where is this place? I'm getting him out!

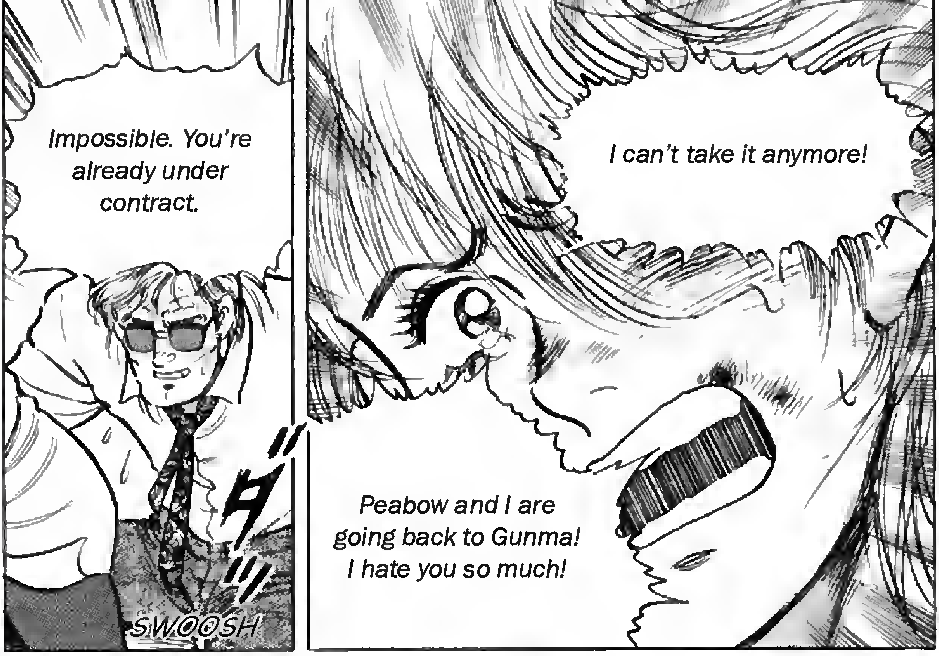
What the bloody hell am I being selfish about!?
You're the last person I'd...
Stop being so selfish, Sako. I won't have that anymore.
Tell me where he is, George!

I'm the one who discovered you.
So I bloody own you!
パニ
SMACK


I won't let you say no. Now that Clark knows our secret...
No...
As your producer I need complete and utter control over you!

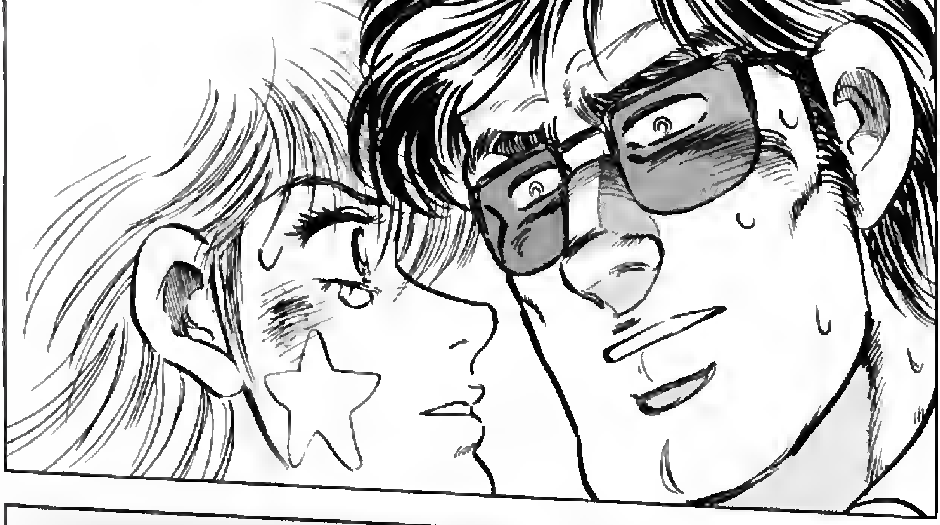
You sing for me! Understand!?
Do you miss your former boyfriend and that little brat!? Then sing about it! If you want to cry, save it for the bloody stage!

NOOOO!
Singing is your...
Sing your heart out, Sako!
That's all you've got left!

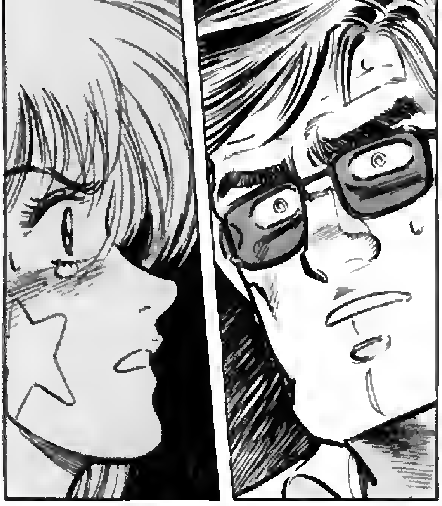

Impossible. You're already under contract.
SWOOSH
I can't take it anymore!
Peabow and I are going back to Gunma! I hate you so much!

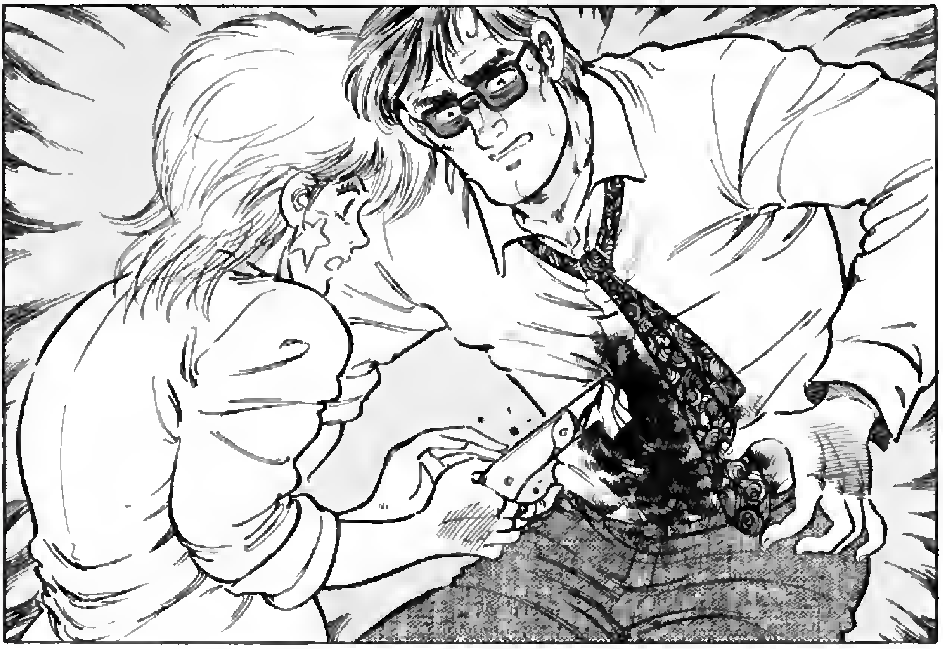
Get away!
Wait, Sako!

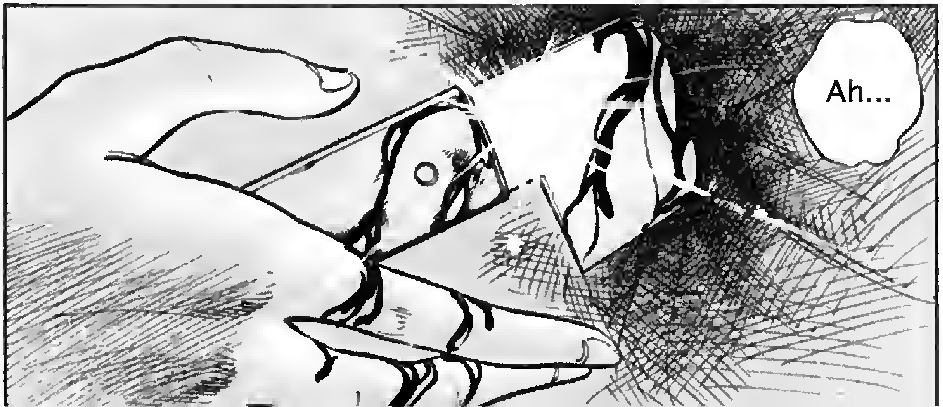
If singing is all you care about...
...then sing your bloody heart out you son of a bitch.
SLAM
Do not make me any angrier than I already am!
Ahh!



Chapter 5 : Deja Vu



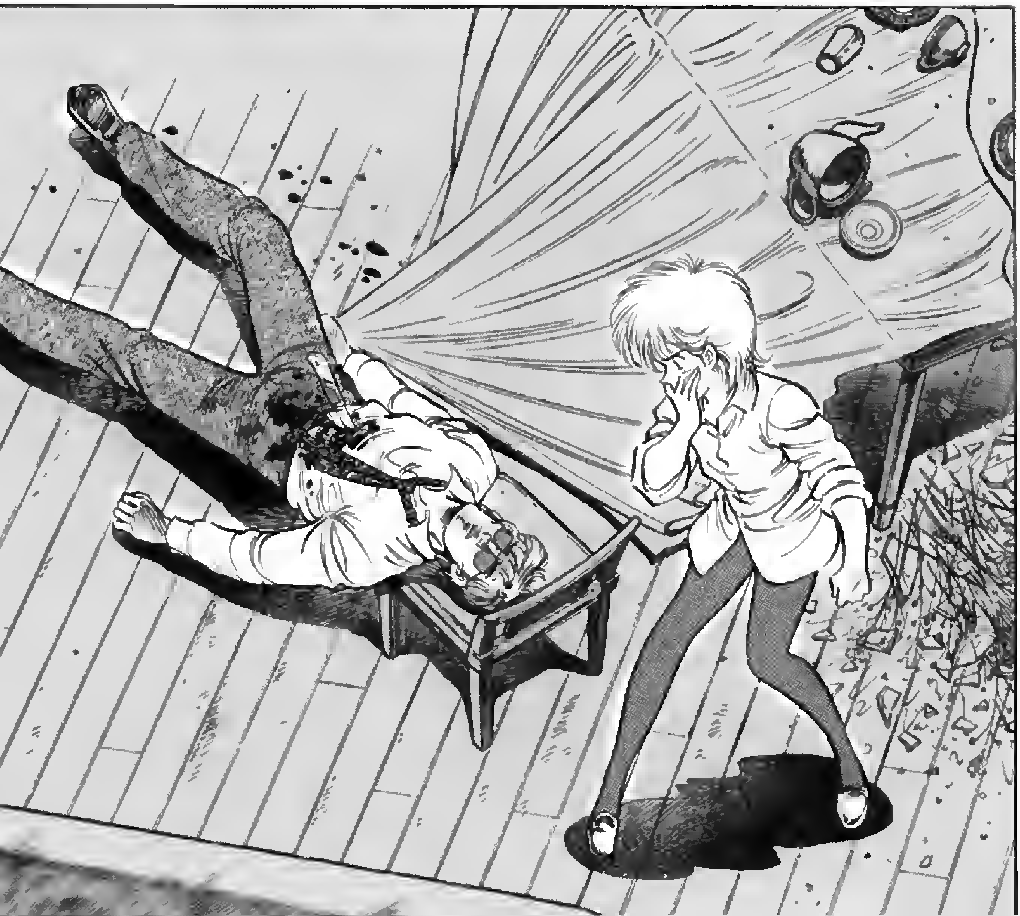


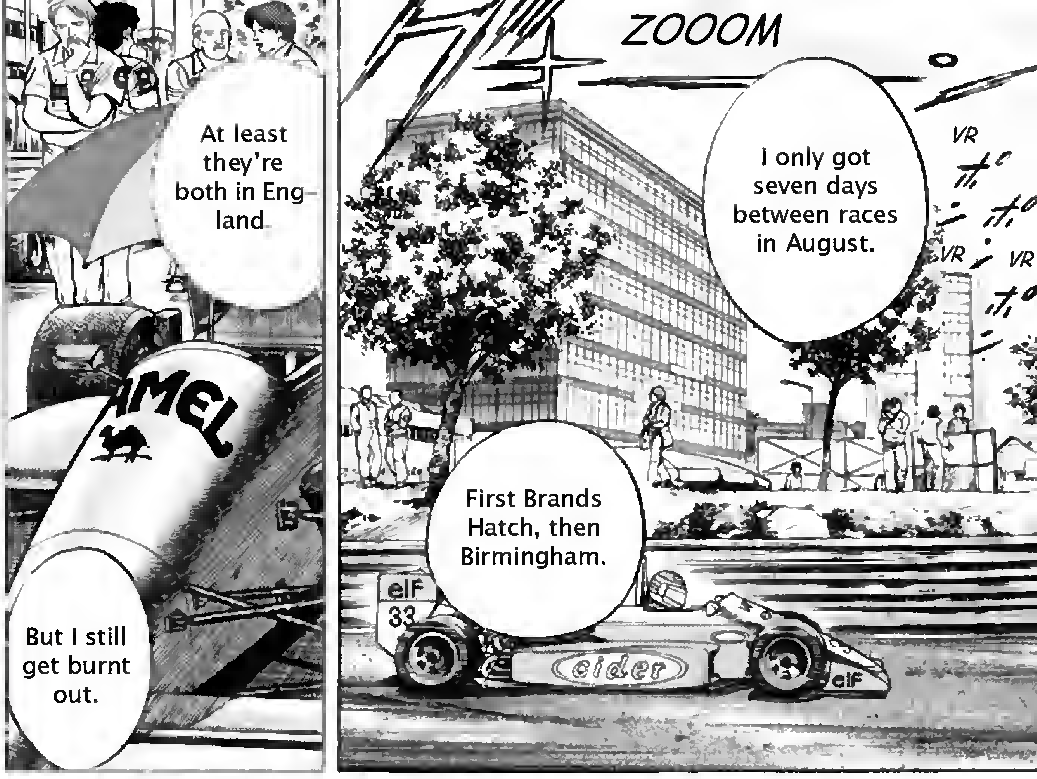

Ah...

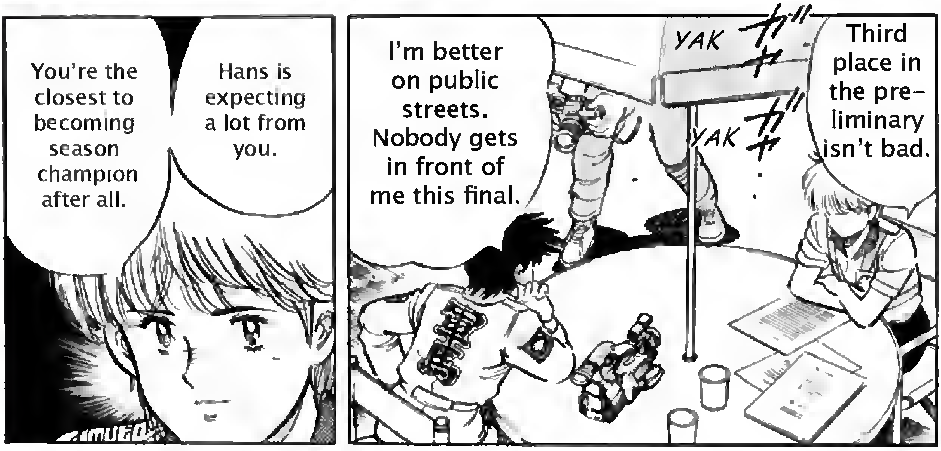
SHIVER
George...
I...
What have I done!?
Urgh...
CLATTER
THUNK
CLATTER
CLATTER
Who'd have thought... you'd have the gumption to...
Urrgh...
George!

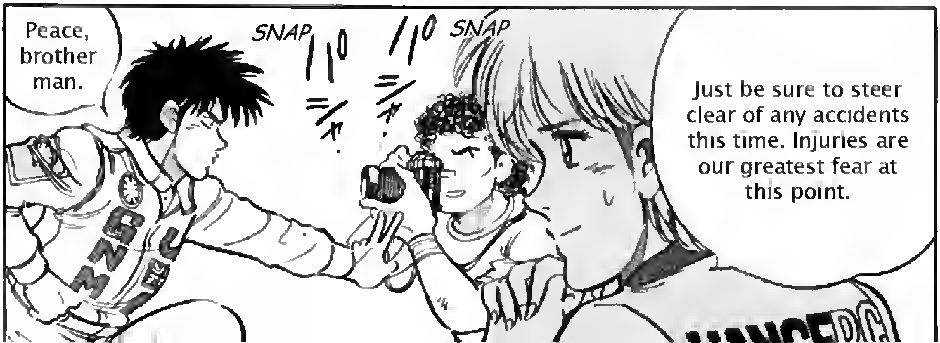
SKRRT
...
Like I just... took a good walloping from my mum...
Heh heh heh...
SKRRT
I'm... shocked at you... Heh.
It's...
I...
I'll call an ambulance!
Old mum... She could really pack a punch...
GRIP
Used to hurt like the devil, her beatings...
THUNK

Geor–
ge!

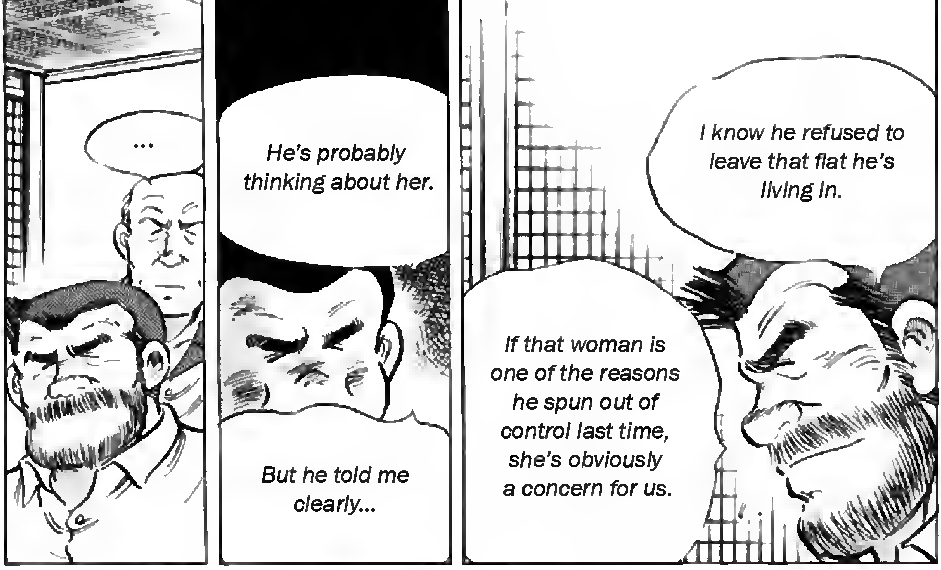


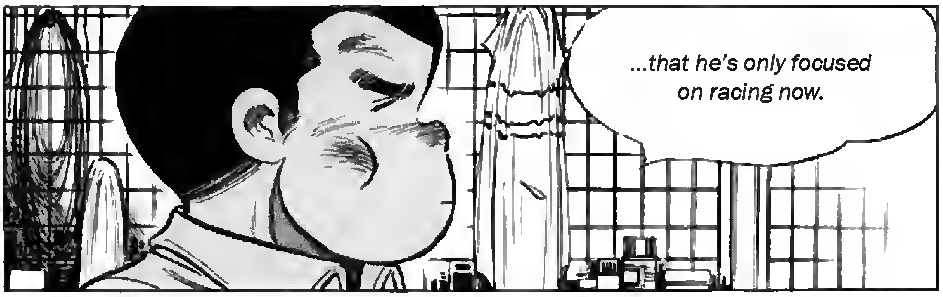

At least they're both in England.
But I still get burnt out.
ZOOOM
I only got seven days between races in August.
First Brands Hatch, then Birmingham.
elF
33
elF


You're the closest to becoming season champion after all.
Hans is expecting a lot from you.
I'm better on public streets. Nobody gets in front of me this final.
YAK
YAK
Third place in the preliminary isn't bad.

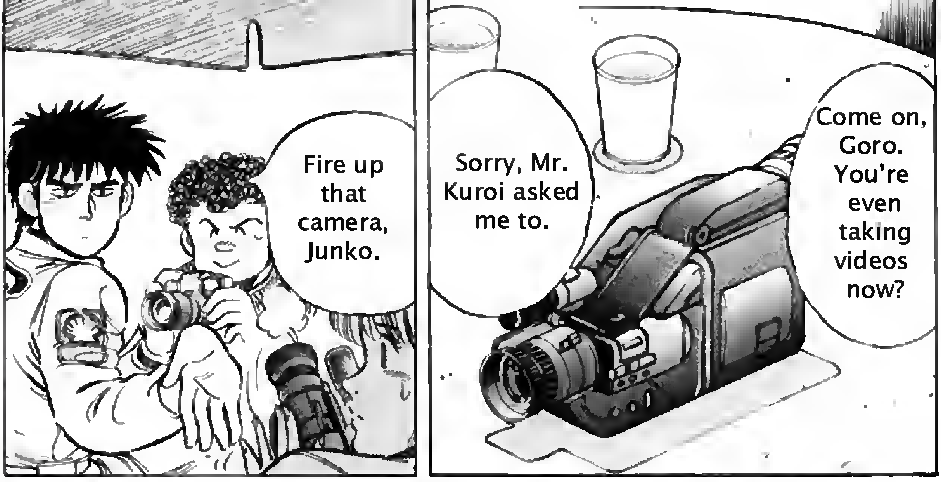

Peace, brother man.
SNAP
SNAP
Just be sure to steer clear of any accidents this time. Injuries are our greatest fear at this point.

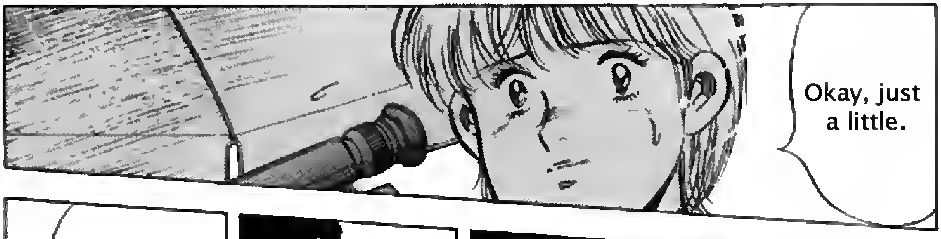
Ridiculous... How could such a man lead all other racers in points?
Such carefree abandon with the final coming up... That's unheard of for a Japanese racer.
POUND
POUND
King Kong!
Money pose!
SNAP SNAP
Has he always been like this, Tamotsu?
Pretty much.
But still...
Let him have a little fun, Hans.
Somebody put an end to this circus! I thought we refused any additional press so we can concentrate.
Everyone has their own way of dealing with things.
I think.
...he's slowly changing on the inside.
So how's it going with that woman Sako?
It's only human to change.
Growth is a part of the human experience.


...
He's probably thinking about her.
But he told me clearly...
I know he refused to leave that flat he's living in.
If that woman is one of the reasons he spun out of control last time, she's obviously a concern for us.

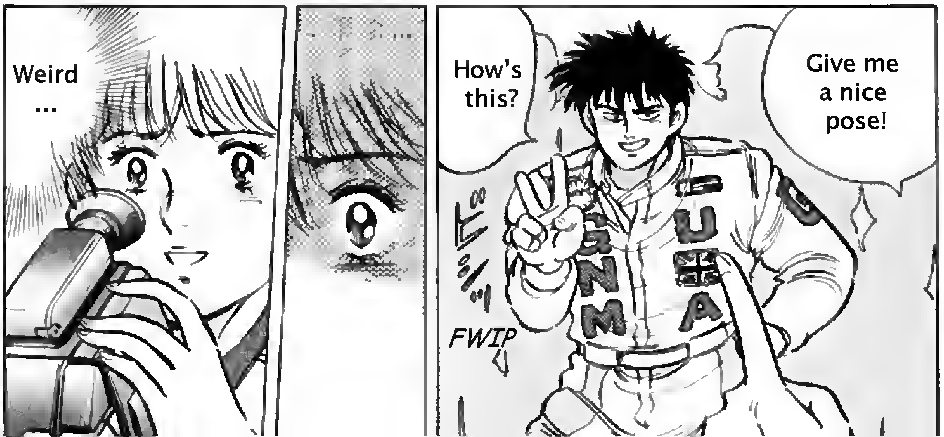

...that he's only focused on racing now.

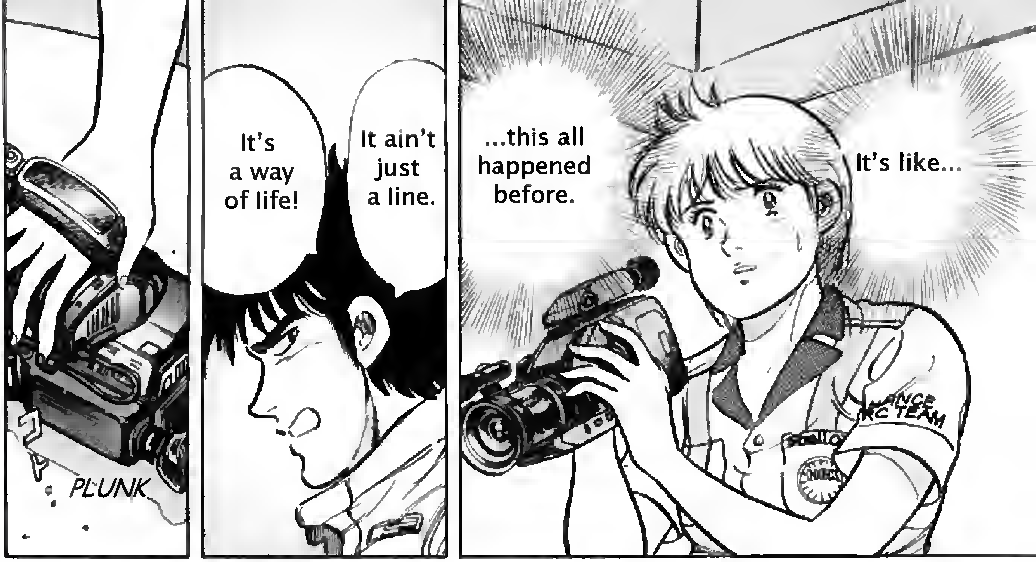
Peace, my brother.
ピース
ピース
I don't know about that...
...but I hope he'll prove it in the next race.
Interesting. So basically...
...he's not battling with his emotions anymore.

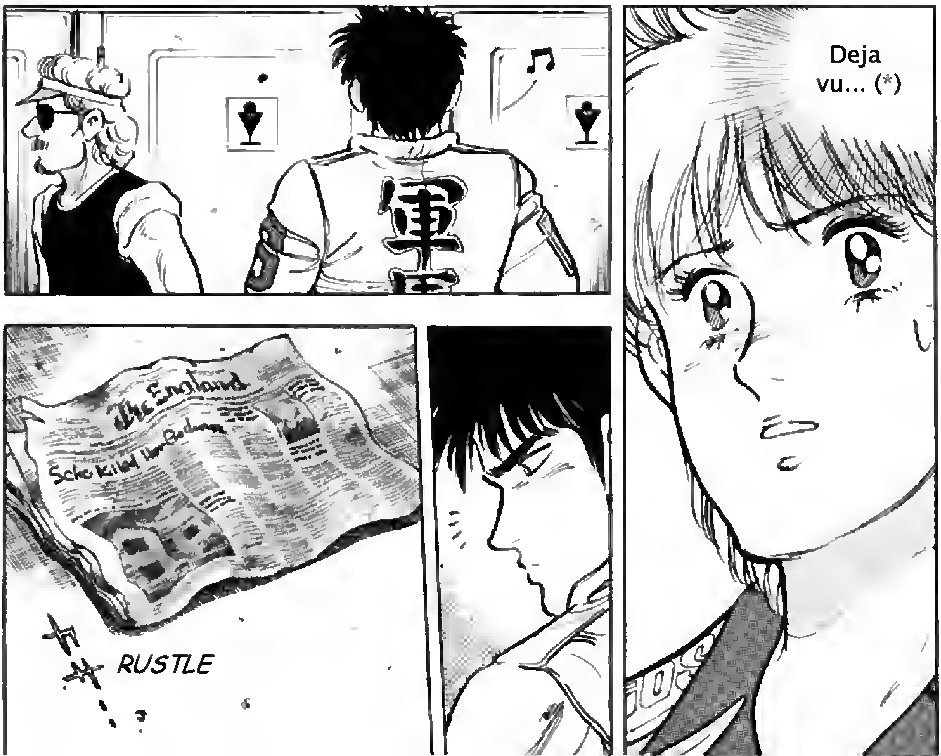

Fire up that camera, Junko.
Sorry, Mr. Kuroi asked me to.
Come on, Goro. You're even taking videos now?


Okay, just a little.

Okay, okay Gunma.
How many times have I heard that...
I'll win this race for us.
Nobody gets in front of me!


Weird ...
How's this?
Give me a nice pose!
FWIP



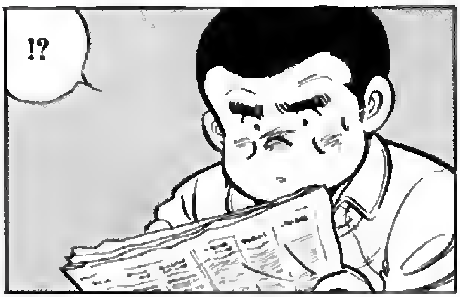


* Deja vu = The feeling that something you are experiencing happened once before in the past.

MURDER
ABC REC
PRODUCER
H. GEORG

?
Get over here.

Tamo-tsu...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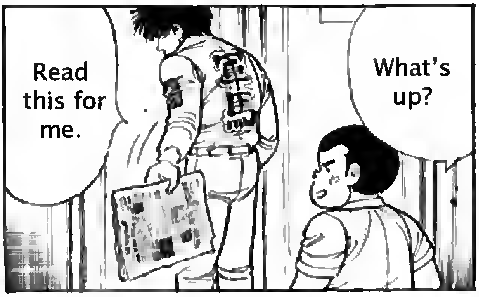
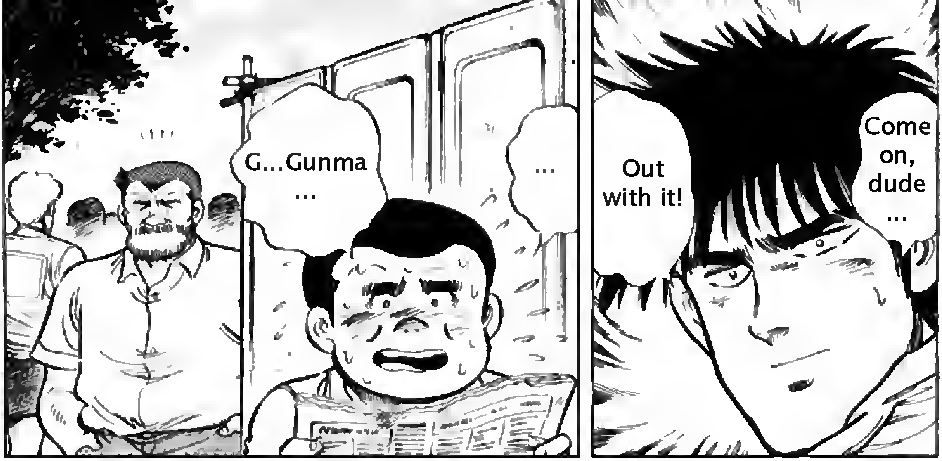
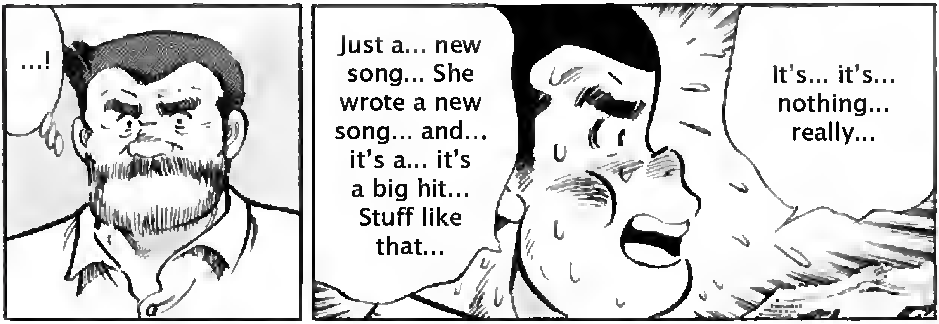
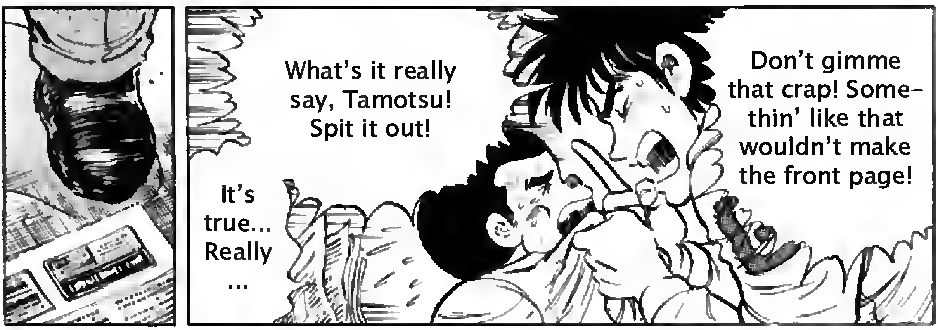

Read this for me.
What's up?

...
What's it say? You know a little English, right?

...!


G...Gunma ...
...
Out with it!
Come on, dude ...


...!
Just a... new song... She wrote a new song... and... it's a... it's a big hit... Stuff like that...
It's... it's... nothing... really...


What's it really say, Tamotsu! Spit it out!
It's true... Really ...
Don't gimme that crap! Some-thin' like that wouldn't make the front page!

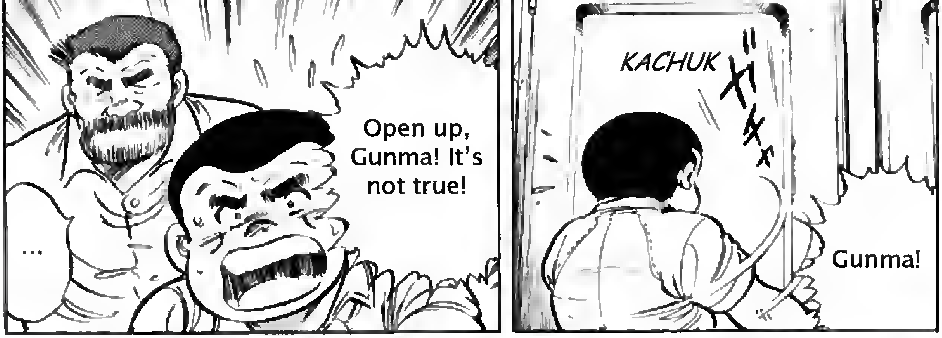
It seems Sako's been arrested for murder...!
Wow...
...

Hey!
Orman!
!?

Murdered somebody?
Sako...
Sa...
Sa...

Stuck him in the chest with a kitchen knife and pierced his heart. Says he almost died instantly.
She killed some producer at ABC Records, named George.

Or-man!
!?
SLAM
She...
Sako...


...
Open up, Gunma! It's not true!
KACHUK
Gunma!

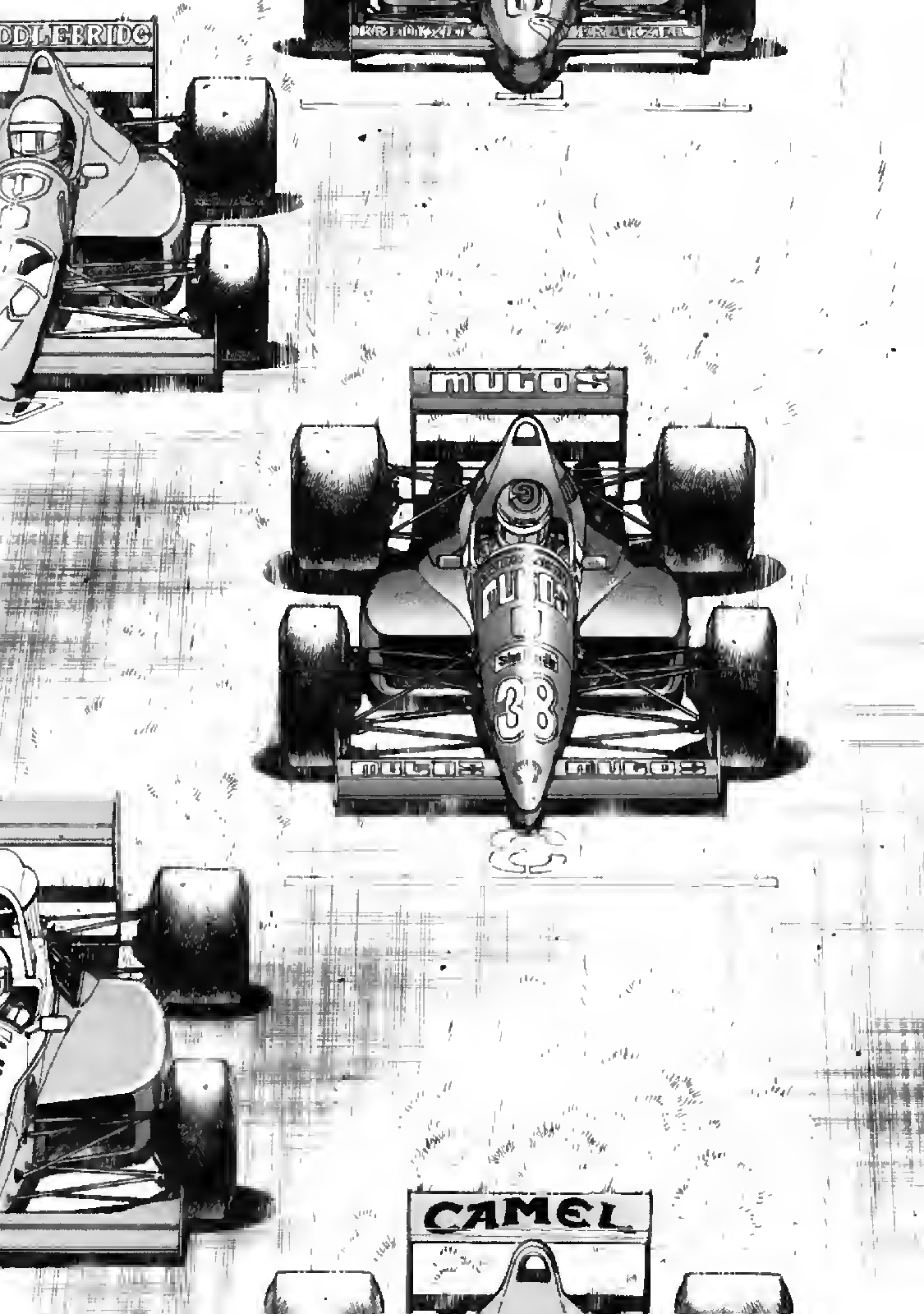
...killed George.
She...

In just a moment...
We're about to kick off the final race of the season for F3000!

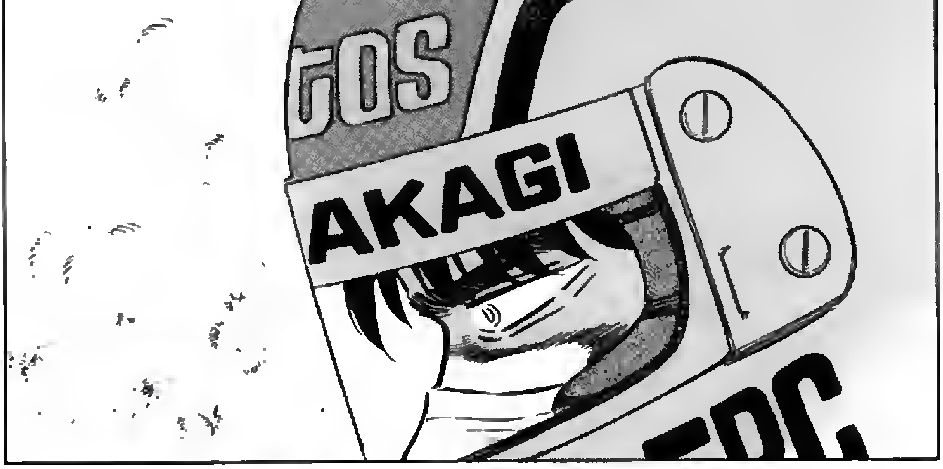
What's going on!? Where the hell is Gunma!?
Gunma...
Gunma ...
Did something happen? The race is about to start.
Right.
HANCE
HANCE RC TEAM
KNOCK
KNOCK
The race is starting.
Come on out, Gunma.

NGK
G U G
N
M A
KACHIK
...
Gunma...!?
Gu...
YEAHHHH

I'll win this race for us. Then we'll get married.
I love you, Junko!
That video I just took...
Okay, okay Ryuji! How many times have I heard that...
YAK
YAK
Gasp
That talk I had with Ryuji...
But this time I'm serious!
How's this?
How can this be...
Give me a nice pose!
AKAGI
...just before the race he died in.
It's exactly the same!


ODLEBRIDG
mutos
38
CAMEL

Chapter 6:
Running on Empty

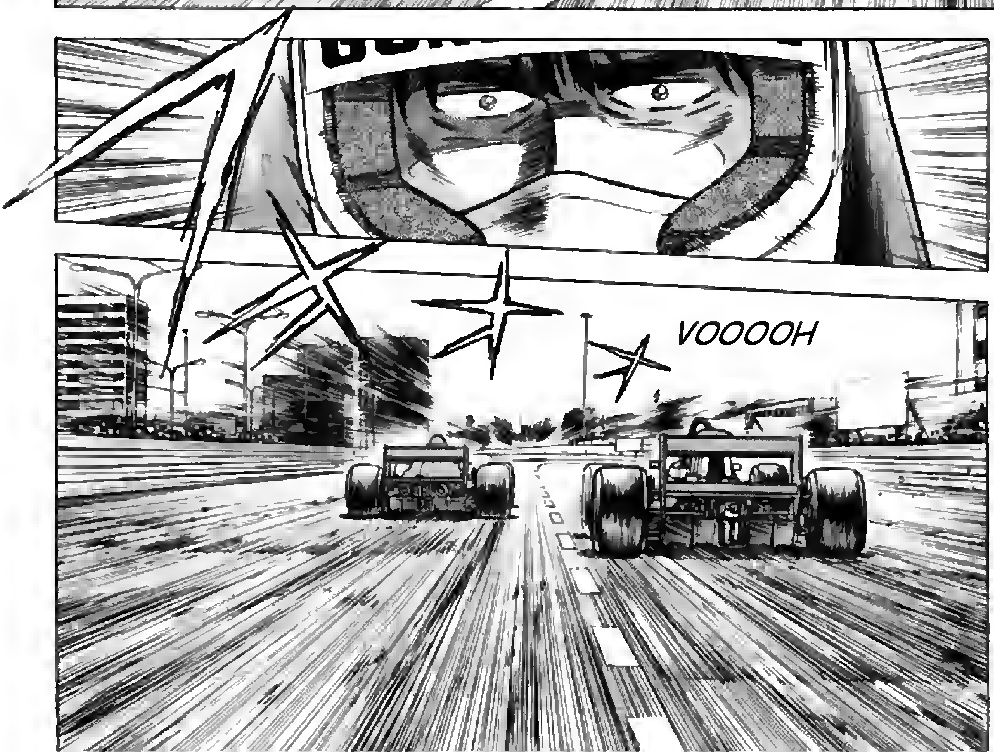

AKAGI

ZWOOOOH
BRAAAAH

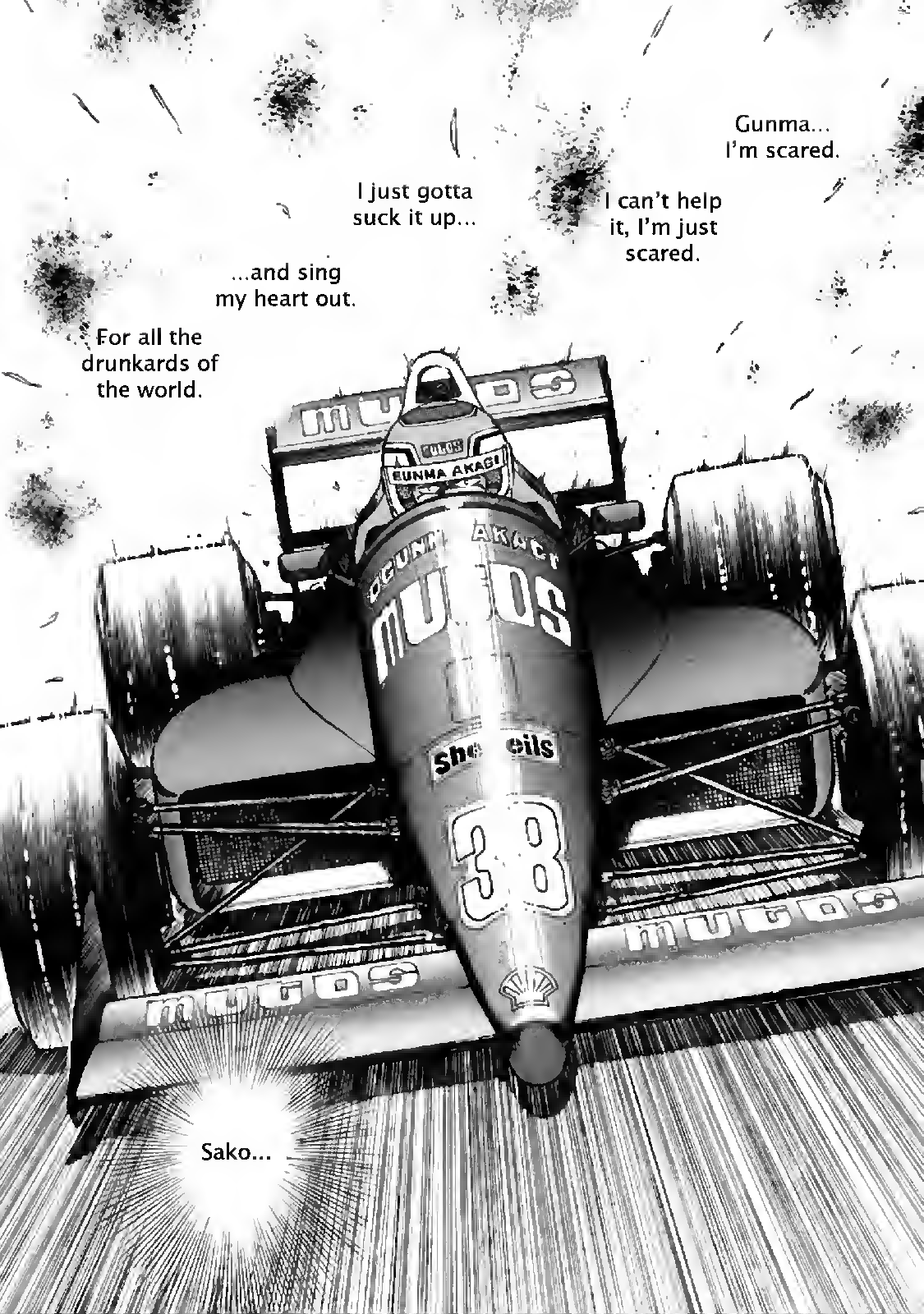
VROOOOOH
GUNMA AKAGI
mutos
VROOOH
mutos
GUNMA AKAGI
VROOOH
Are you okay, Gunma?
His eyes...
Can you really race in this condition?
ZOOOM

!?
Junko, I didn't know how to handle it!
YAK
YAK
What's wrong, Tamo-tsu?
What in the world happened?
When I saw that look in his eyes, I just couldn't stop him.
Can he really race in this condition?
FERODO
Sako murdered someone!?
!?
This.
Wha...
Gunma found that article, and Orman told him exactly what it says, just before the race...
How could this be...

CINCLE
What!?


VOOOOH

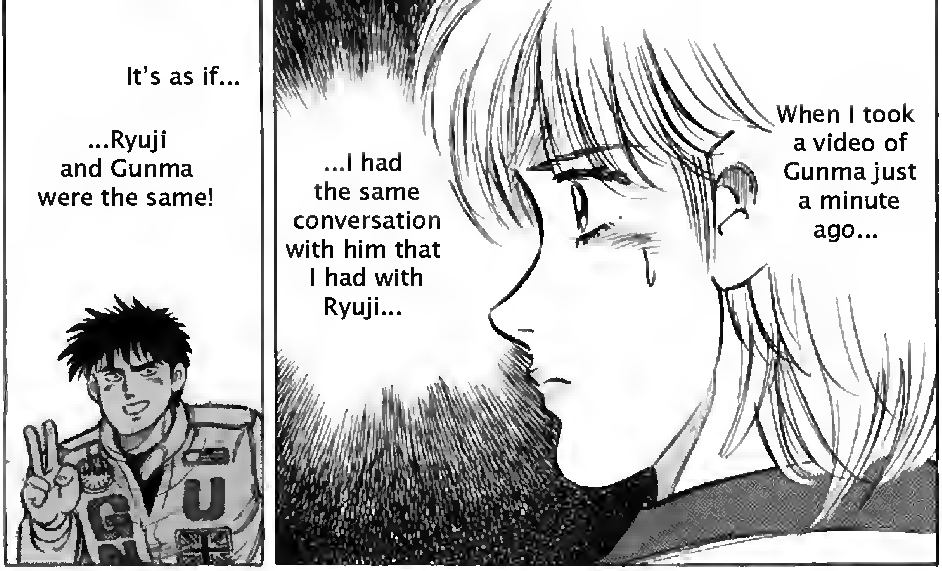
KAGI
My name's Hisako Hara. What's yours?
I may not look it, but I'm Japanese, born in Kyushu.
Make love to me if you want. I'm clean.
You'll be manager. I'll release a bunch of records, we'll tour the world...
...and live together forever. Just the three of us!
He can run his way to the afterlife for all I care!
Gunma!
Gunma!
I'm so happy...
Did it... feel good?
Really?
Hm hm hm...
You were incredible. Like some kind of... beast.
AKAGI


Gunma...
I'm scared.
I can't help it, I'm just scared.
I just gotta suck it up...
...and sing my heart out.
For all the drunkards of the world.
GUNMA AKAGI
38
Sako...

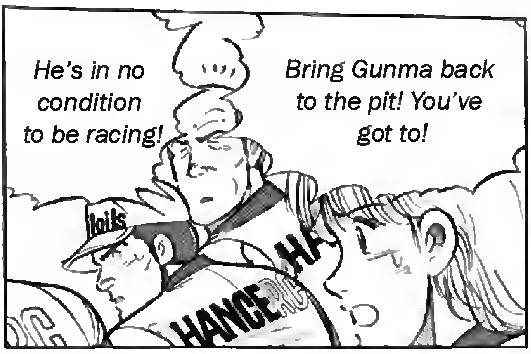
VROOOOH
CAMEL
3
AVON
25
Loose Plan

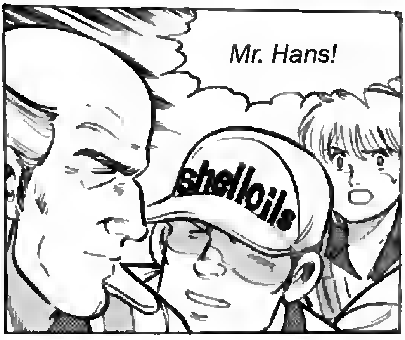
Ryuji...

Tell me, Junko!
Should I have done whatever it takes to stop him!?


It's as if...
...Ryuji and Gunma were the same!
...I had the same conversation with him that I had with Ryuji...
When I took a video of Gunma just a minute ago...

But why!?

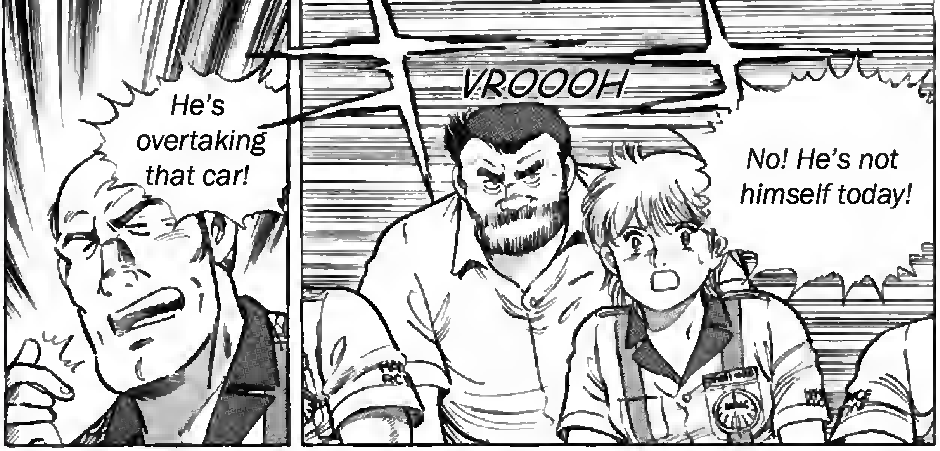

He's in no condition to be racing!
Bring Gunma back to the pit! You've got to!


Mr. Hans!
shelloils

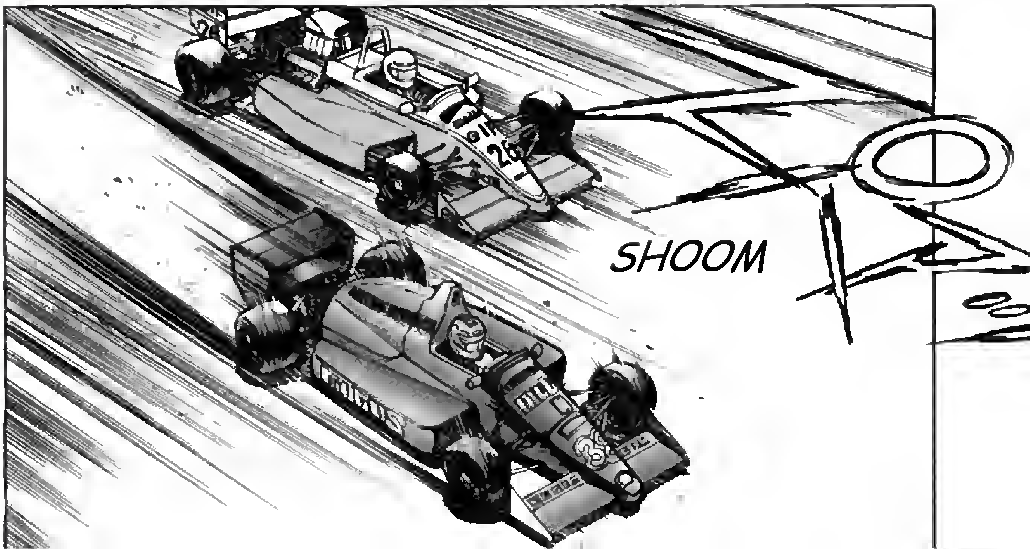
Junko!
Just put up the sign for a pit stop! Please, sir!

What do you mean?

ZOOOOOM
What's wrong with him?
It's Gunma...! He's... he's...!
What are you so excited about? This isn't like you.
Take a look! He's driven a full lap and he's in third place!
CAMEL
AKAGI

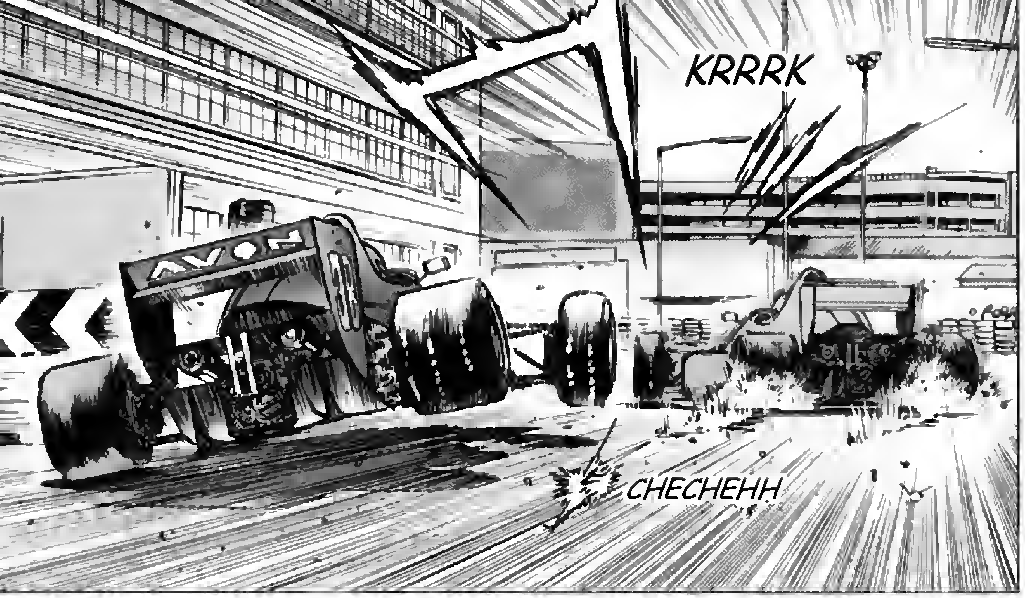

He's overtaking that car!
VROOOH
No! He's not himself today!

KUNK
AVON

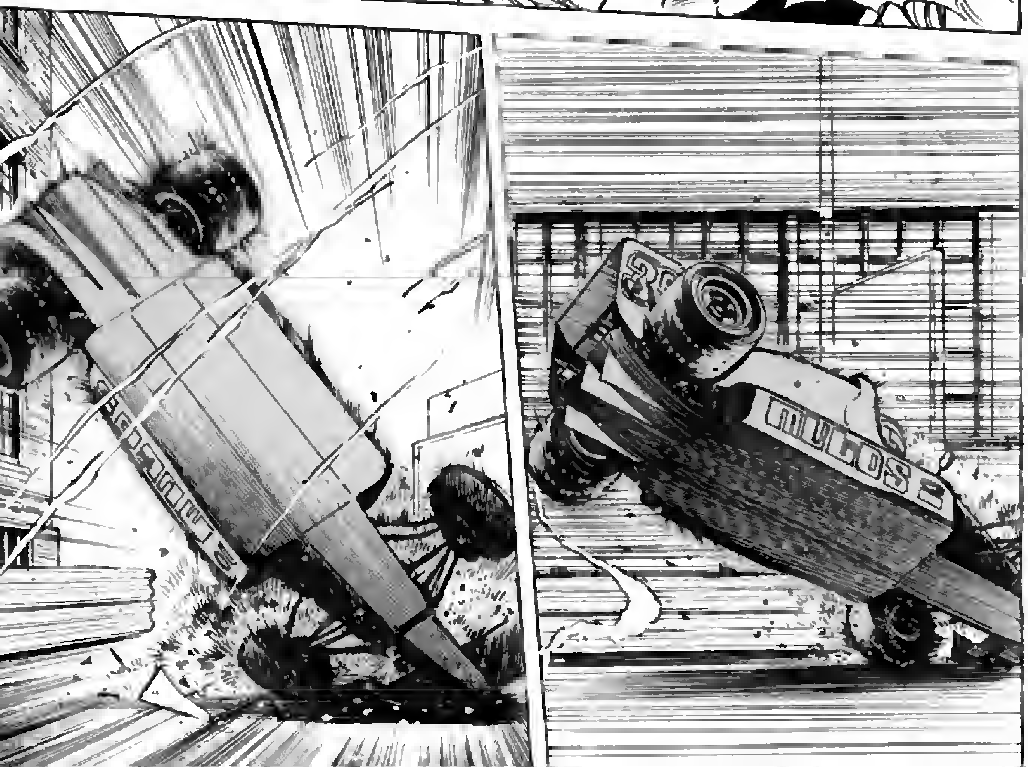

SHOOM

What is it you're so wound up about, Junko?
I'll admit he's not his usual self.
Looks quite stable to me.
You see? He skillfully used the slipstream to overtake that car.
Absolutely. Seeing that article will allow him to focus on the race even more than usual.
You expect him to race out there after he saw that terrible article!?
A racer behind the wheel is no longer your average man.
Can you understand that?
He might have what it takes to make it to the top.
And I wanted to test his resolve today.

We're begging you, sir. Get Gunma off the course...
Absolutely not!
Junko...
Please...
Mr. Orman, call Gunma back into the pit.
Shell Oils
And his car's in fine condition!
There's no reason to call him in!
He's racing brilliantly, more focused than ever!
...told me not to let him die.
Ryuji...
Yes there is. My boyfriend from years ago, who's dead now...
KRAK
What are you talking about?
So please, Mr. Orman! Pull him out!


KRRRK
AVON
CHECHEHH

!!
There's been an accident at the end of Sherlock Street! The top group of drivers have collided!

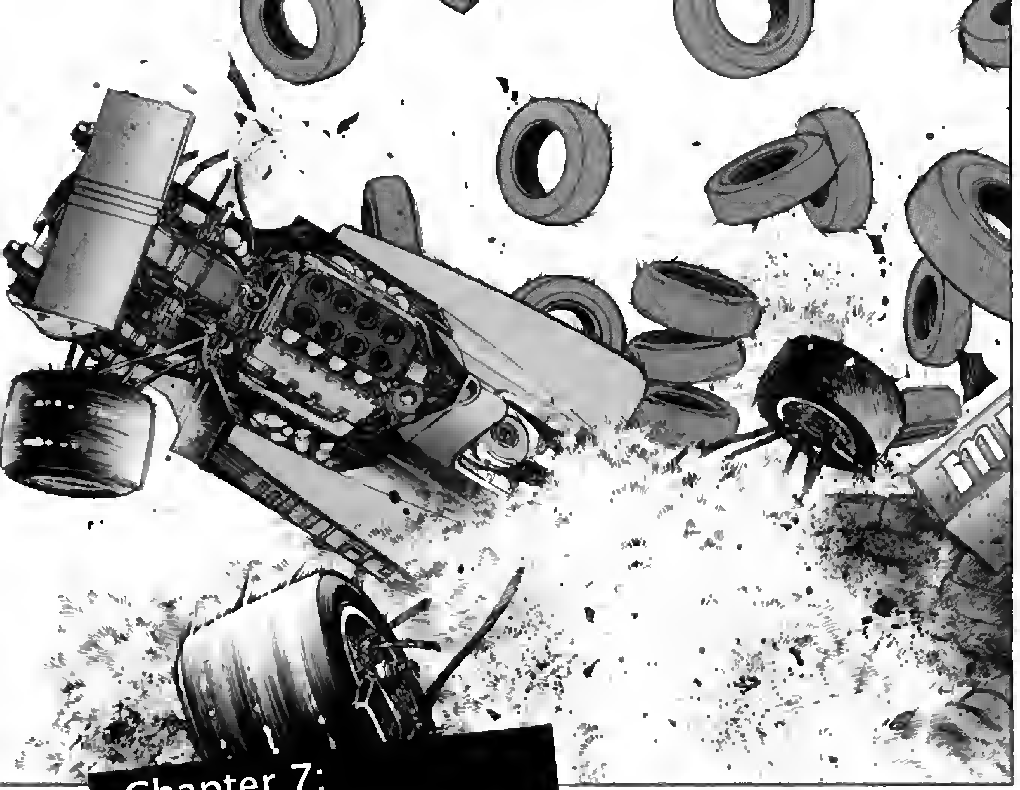


AKAGI
HA

AKAGI

HA

BSHAHHHH
AKAGI
G-Gun-
ma!

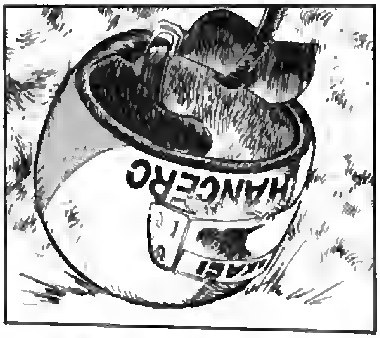


Chapter 7: Residents of the Fog

Chapter 7:
Residents of the Fog

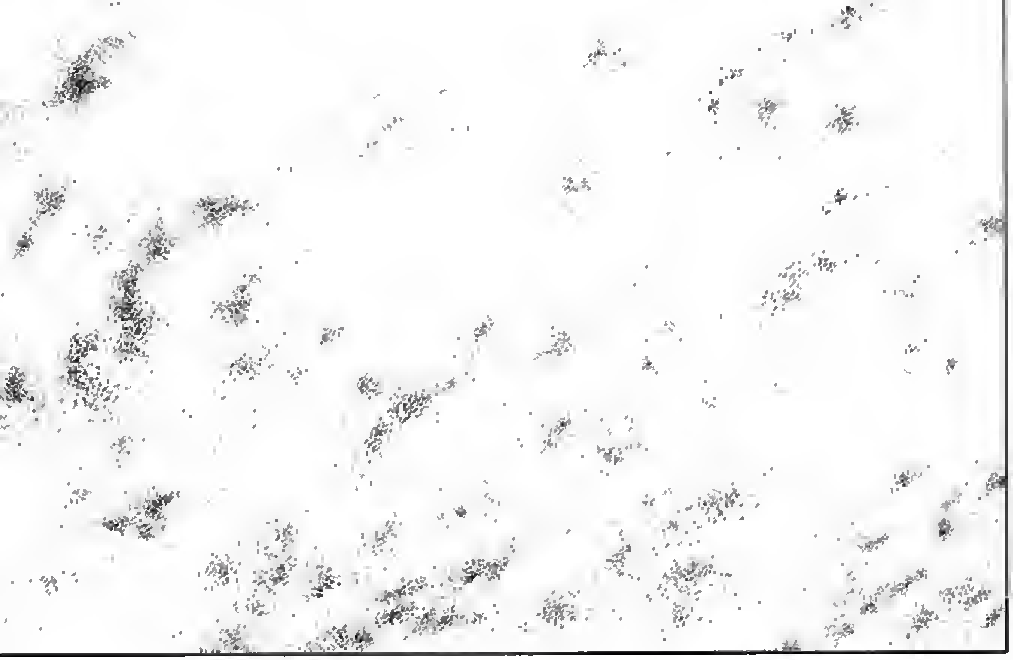
Chapter 7: Residents of the Fog

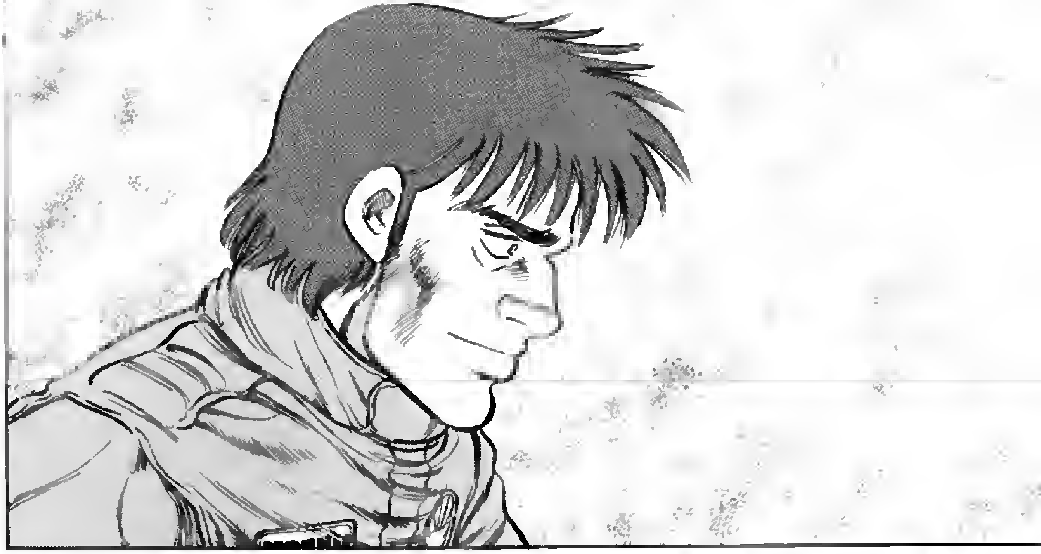
Shell
Shell

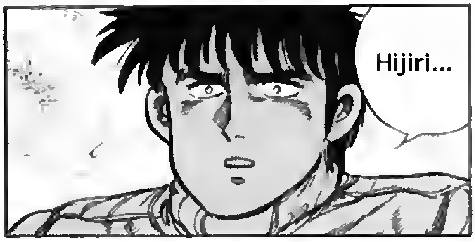

HANCERO

NUTOS
GUNTA

ANCE






Hijiri...

I was wat-
ching you.

What the hell are you doing here?

...it's been pretty rough.
Actu-ally...
Yeah, not bad...
You're doing well.
If it's that bad, come join us here.
...
Never thought I'd hear you com-plain.
Oh yeah? Ha ha ha.
...
Yes, right here.
Here?
!!
Hijiri...
...what is this place?
But...

It's really you, ain't it!
Yu...
Yuki!
Hm hm... Nice to see you again, Gunma.
...gossiping about you.
You're welcome here. We've been drinking tea at that table...
Wow, this is awesome! Never thought I'd see you again!
HA HA HA

Sit down with us.
Are you... Ryuji?
Nice to meet you.
Arai
But it's great... Seein' you all here like this.
HEH HEH
It is now that you mention it.
This is a trip.
Never thought about it. Ha ha ha...
I love it.
HM HM HM
HA HA HA
Defi-nitely.
HM HM HM HM
HEH HEH HEH
HA HA HA HA

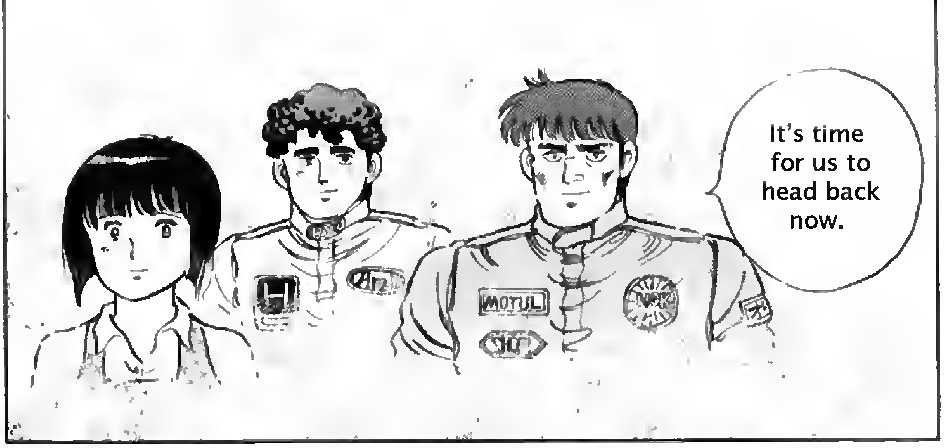
He needs more blood!
Vital signs are fading!
Hurry!

Ha ha ha...
Hm hm hm...
Heh heh heh...
Ha ha ha ha...

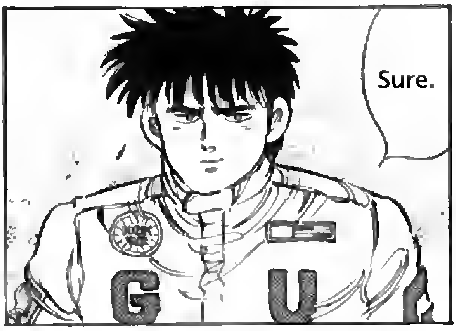
...I shouldn't have told him about that newspaper article.
I guess...
チラ…
GLANCE
It's been three hours already.
.....

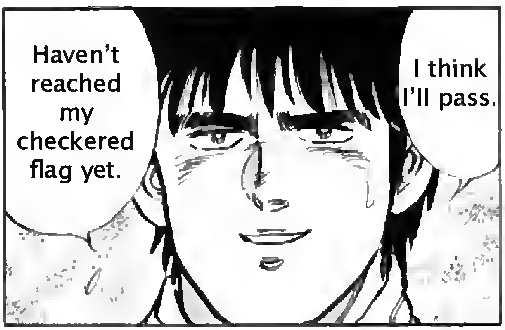
HA HA HA
はは
HA HA
はは
Wuuhuh
...
Guuuhuh
...
Guuuh
...

Wuuuhuhuh...
Guuuhuhuh...


It's time for us to head back now.

You coming with us?

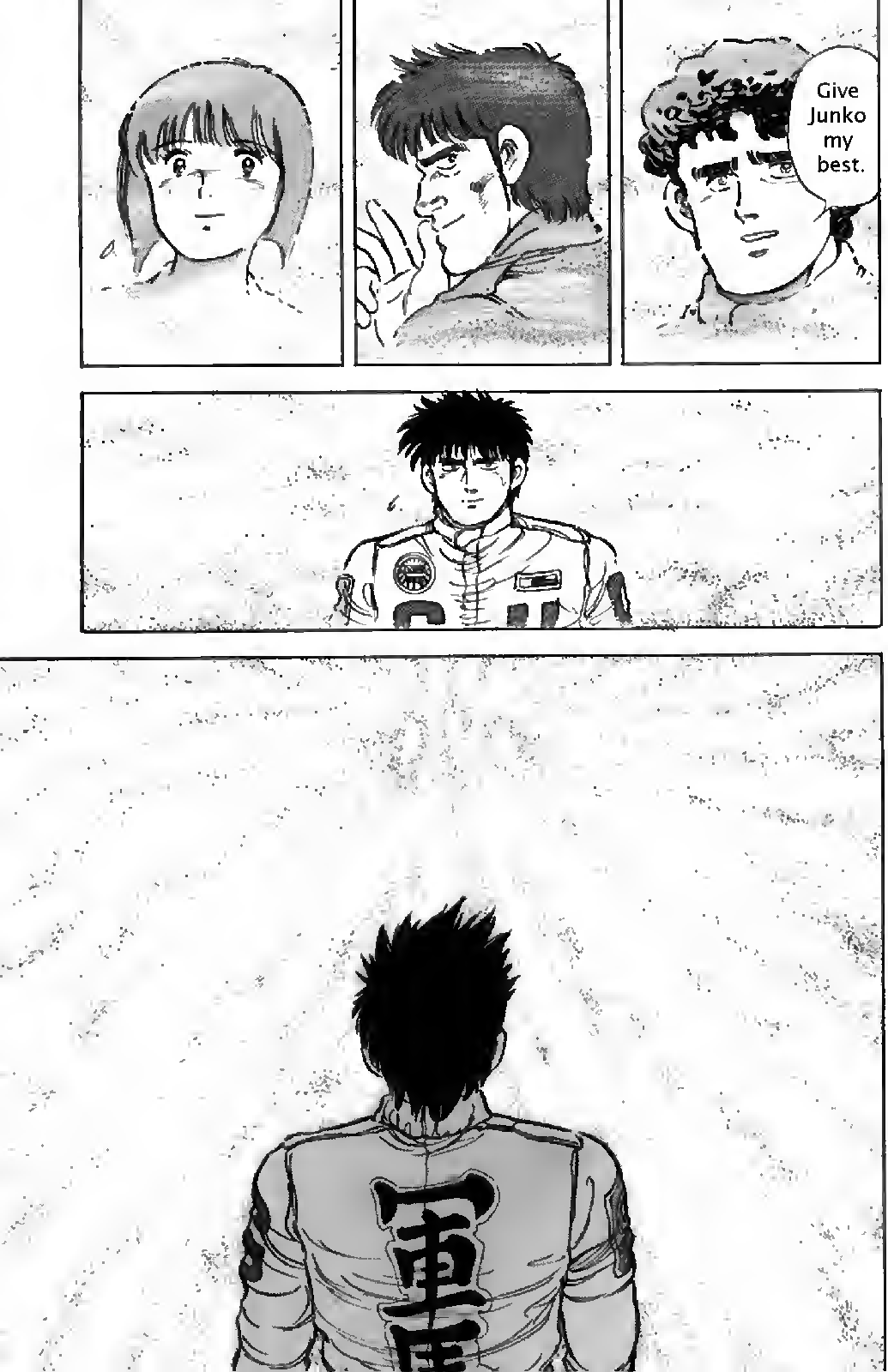

Sure.


Haven't reached my checkered flag yet.
I think I'll pass.

Nah.
...

Yeah, me too.

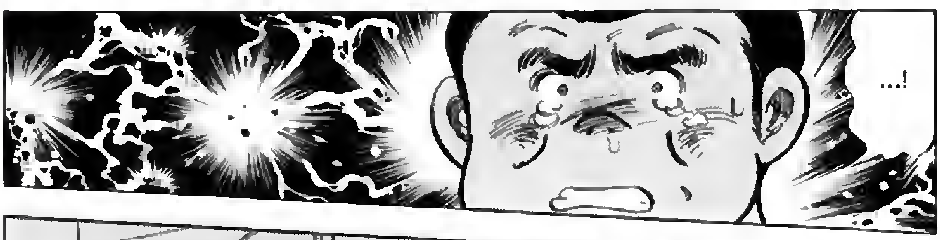
It was fun to see you, Gunma.
I got ya.


Give Junko my best.

How is Gunma doing!?
...
TAK
TAK
TAK
...
TREMBLE
TREMBLE
Still under the knife.
Are you kidding me!? It's been well over four hours!
Come get me immediately after his surgery!
All right.
The lobby is crawling with journos.
TAK
TAK
!
If... If anything...

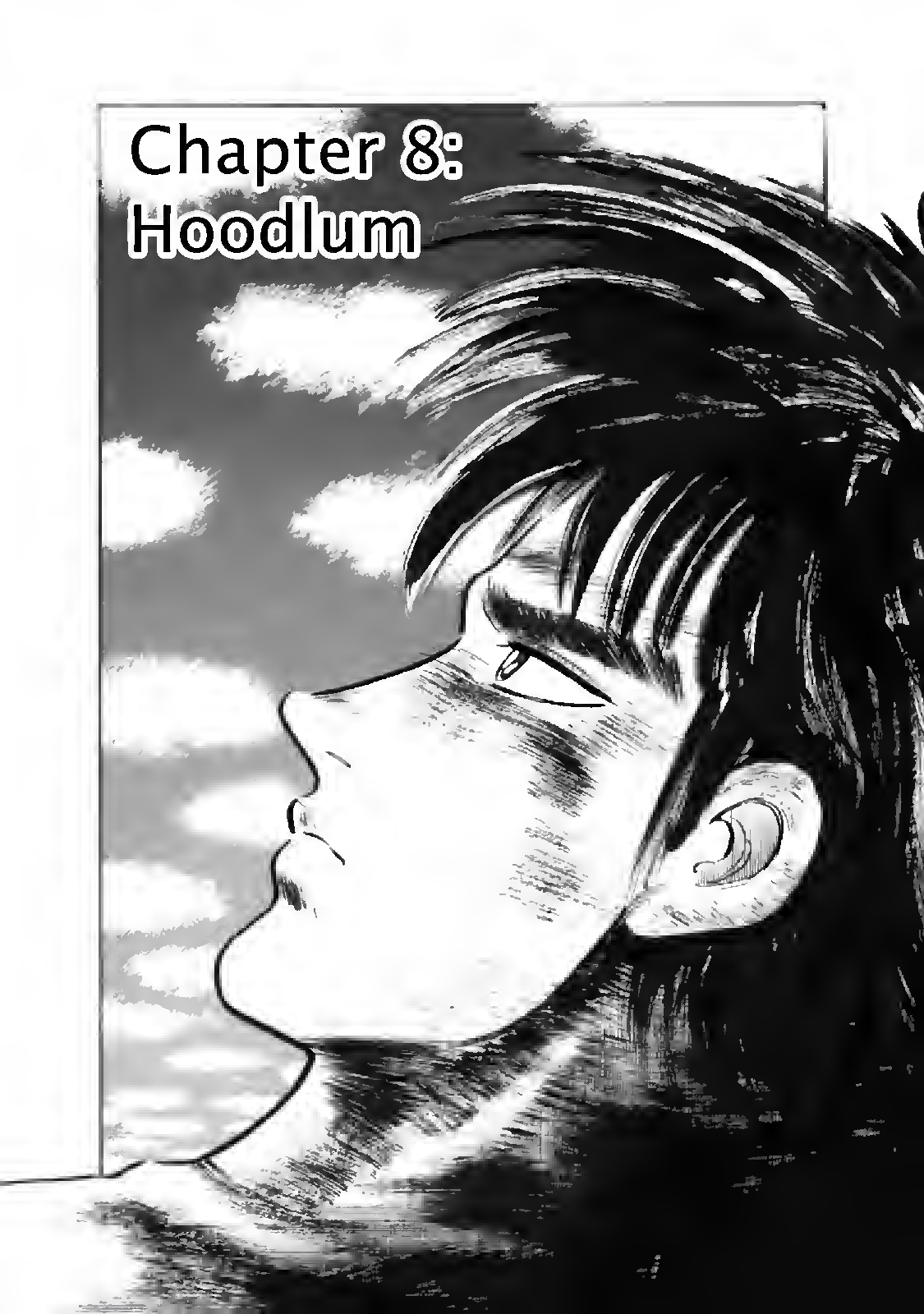
I'm used to being hated, so do what you want to me.
...
TREMBLE TREMBLE
I'll never forgive you for this, Orman!
If anything happens to Gunma...

Trying to hide the truth from him and let him race...
...is an arrogant thing to do!
And nobody should meddle with that.
Whatever happens to Gunma is ultimately his own fate.
But I've got one thing to say to you, boy.


...!

KREE

The operation went well.
He's a real fighter, this one. There were several moments I thought he might not make it, but he stuck it out.
He'll be fine now.

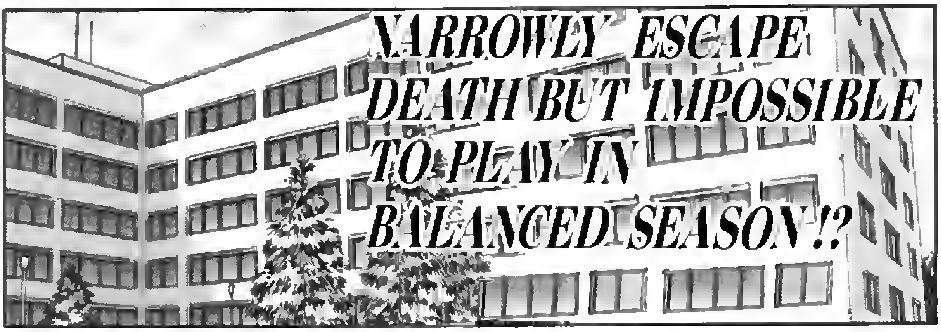

Chapter 8:
Hoodlum

INTERNATIONAL F3000

CAUSE A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT IN BIRMINGHAM!

GUNMA AKAGI, MORTALLY INJURED

A MAJOR OPERATION FOR 4 HOURS



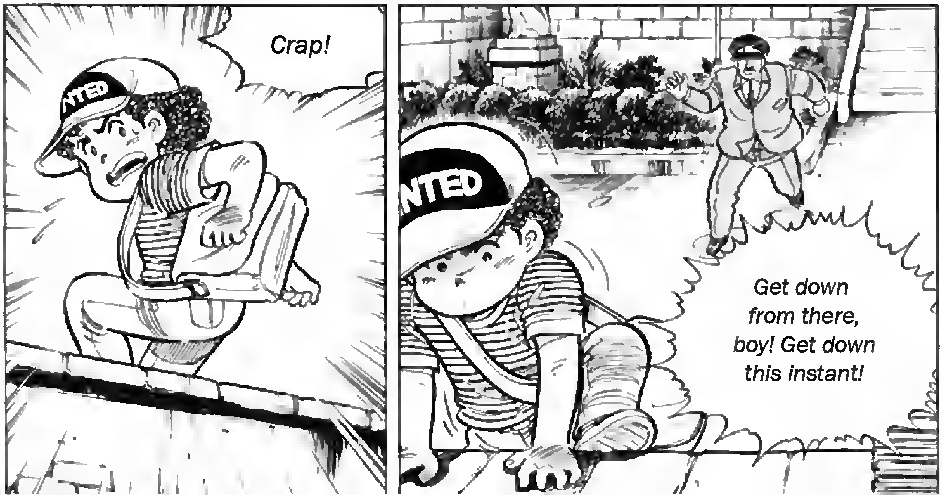
NARROWLY ESCAPE DEATH BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO PLAY IN BALANCED SEASON!?

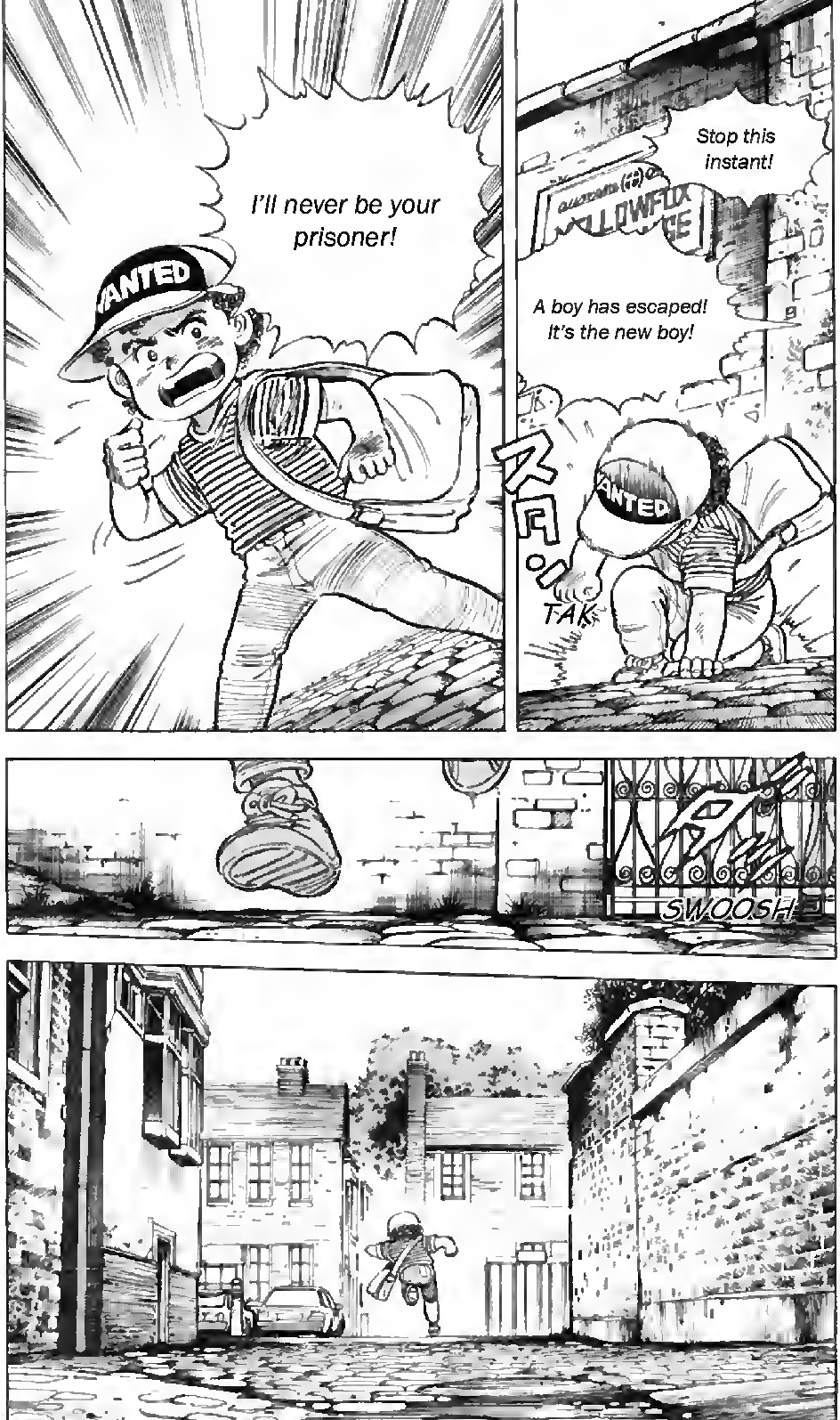
WHO CAN THAT BE, SERIES' CHAMPION!?

THE LIFE OF GUNMA AKAGI AS A DRIVER...!?

Yellow Fox Orphanage

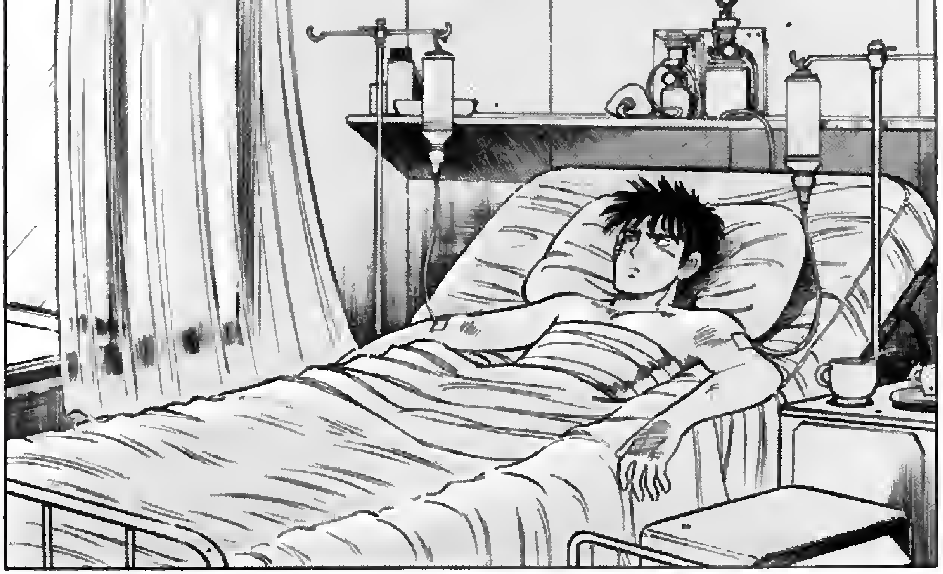
ANTED
THUNK
YELLOWFOX
ORPHANAGE

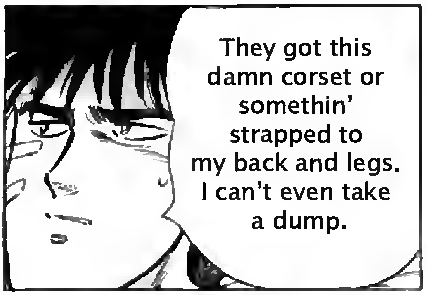

Crap!
NTED
Get down from there, boy! Get down this instant!

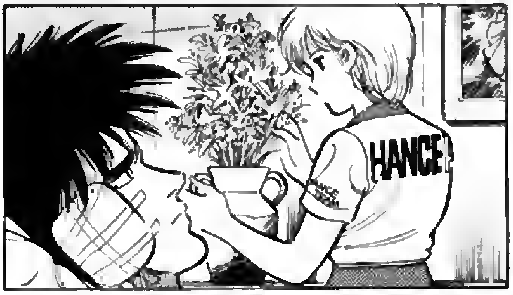

I'll never be your prisoner!
WANTED
Stop this instant!
A boy has escaped! It's the new boy!
WANTED
TAK
SWOOSH

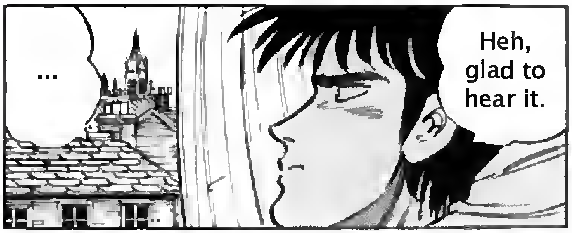
WANTED
Oh my!
SWOOSH
WANTED
It's my daughter's birthday. We want to make it extra special this year.
IRRRRK
HONK
Someone stop him! That boy stole my bag!
Oh my!
THUNK
Borough
FOREM
COURT
MARC + CHRIS + ANDY WERE HERE

WANTED
We saw what happened. You've got some balls, kid. Heh heh...
I choose C.
WANTED
I give you both a good thrashing, take my money, and walk away.
So we'll give you a choice.
SURFAC
You can choose A: we give you a good thrashing and take your money, or B: we spare you the thrashing, take your money, and you work for us. So which is it!?
What!?




They got this damn corset or somethin' strapped to my back and legs. I can't even take a dump.

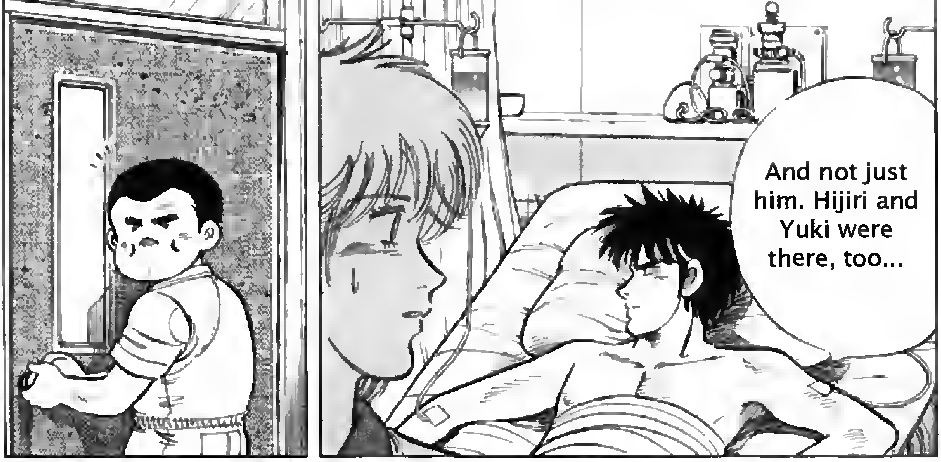

HANCE


...
Heh, glad to hear it.

They're both there.

Do I still got both my legs?

Huh!?
I met Ryuji, Junko.


And not just him. Hijiri and Yuki were there, too...

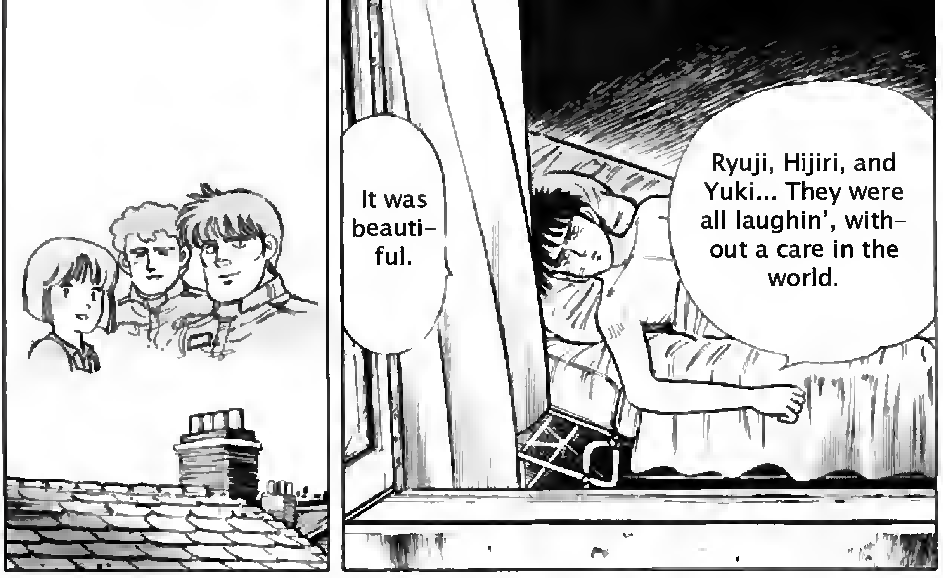
You were drea-ming.

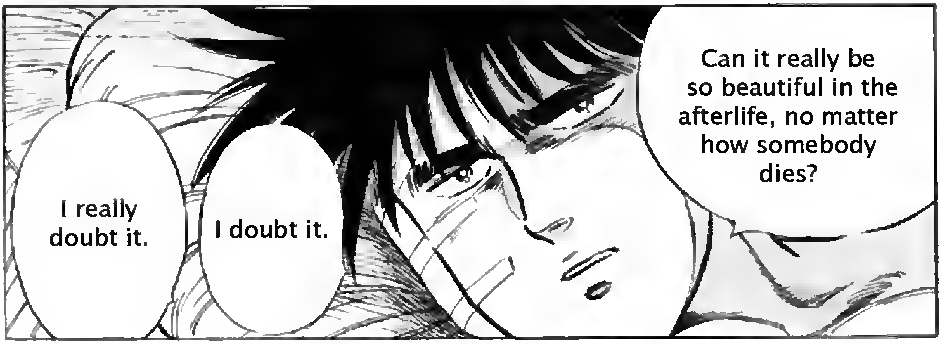
It wasn't no dream.

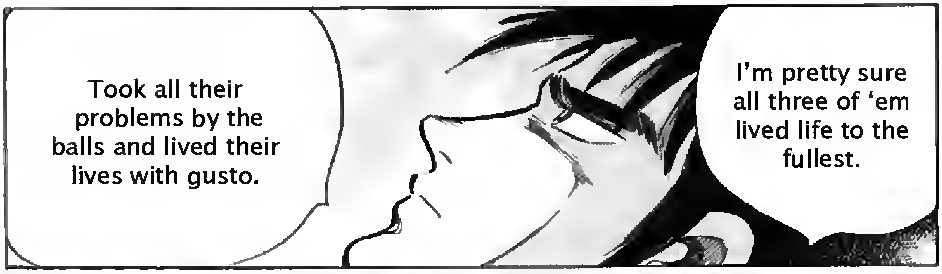
We were surrounded by some kinda thick fog.
There was a table there, with cookies and tea... We talked and laughed together.

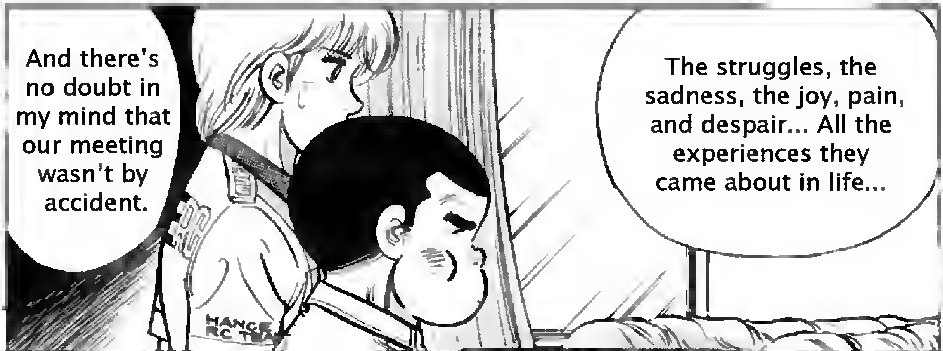
...I was stuck between this world and the next.
Seemed to me like...

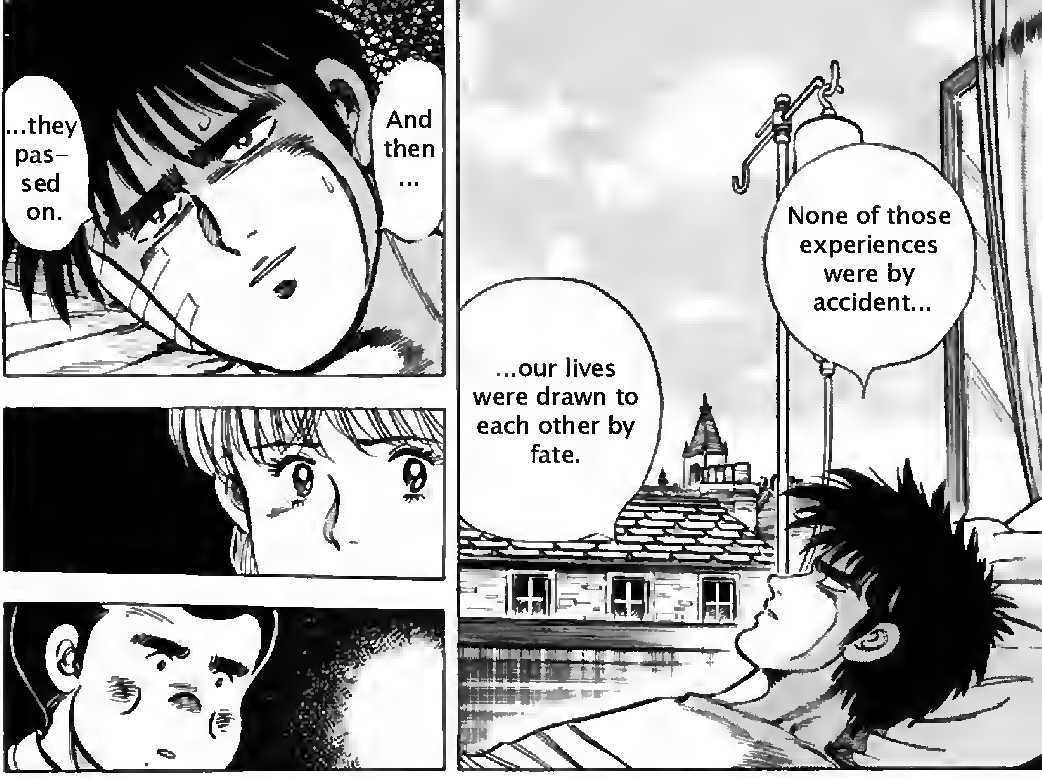
So I got to see them.


It was beautiful.
Ryuji, Hijiri, and Yuki... They were all laughin', without a care in the world.


I really doubt it.
I doubt it.
Can it really be so beautiful in the afterlife, no matter how somebody dies?


Took all their problems by the balls and lived their lives with gusto.
I'm pretty sure all three of 'em lived life to the fullest.

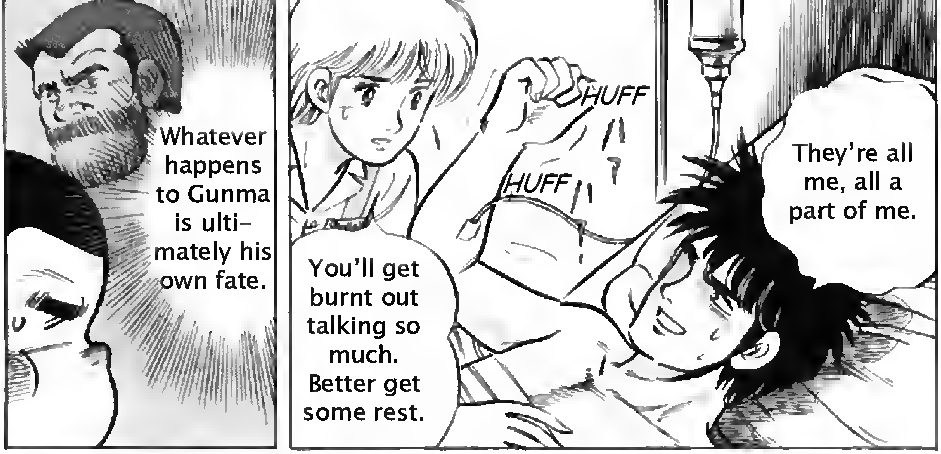

And there's no doubt in my mind that our meeting wasn't by accident.
The struggles, the sadness, the joy, pain, and despair... All the experiences they came about in life...


...they pas-sed on.
And then ...
None of those experiences were by accident...
...our lives were drawn to each other by fate.

From cradle to grave, the reason I am who I am is because of all the people I met on the way.
I wasn't the man I am today from the very be-ginning.
That's what I think.

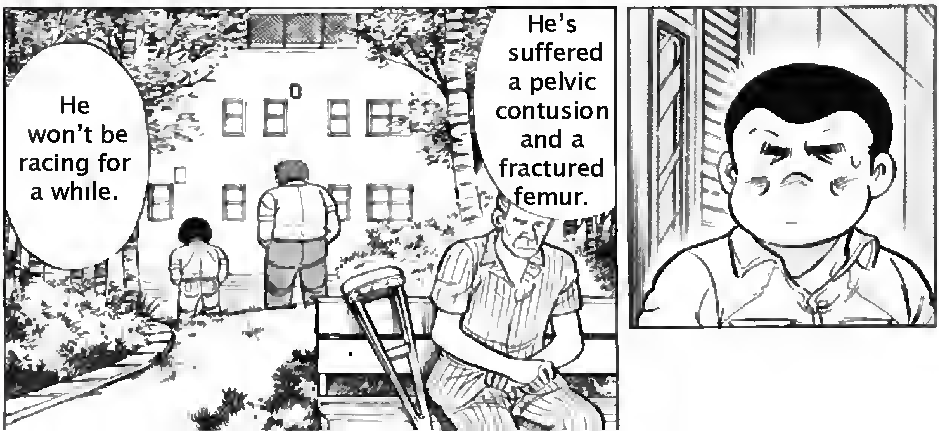
But when you think about it, it's only common sense.
Don't it?
Sounds pretty com-plicated, Gunma.

I wasn't the man I am today from the very beginning.
Make sense?
The person I was to my mama, to my pops...
...to Shoma and Yuma...
...to Tamotsu, Junko, Yuki, Granny, and those dudes at the apartment... To Mr. Morioka, Kuroi, Yasu, and Goro...
...to Hijiri, Otoya, and all my rivals in the circuit...
...to Hans, Orman, the drunks downtown...
...and to Sako and Peabow...


Whatever happens to Gunma is ultimately his own fate.
You'll get burnt out talking so much. Better get some rest.
HUFF
HUFF
They're all me, all a part of me.

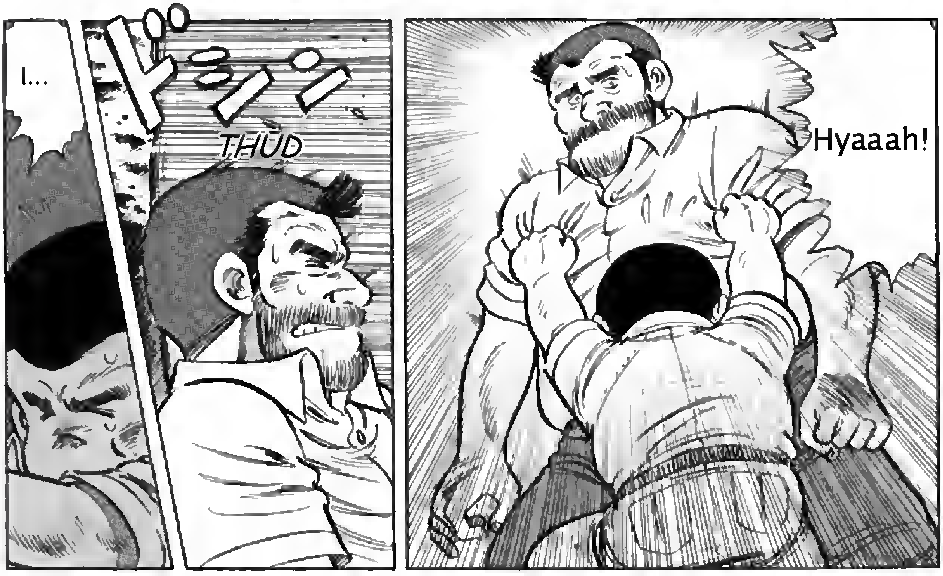
And nobody should meddle with that.
...that includes me, and everyone else. Right?
...everybody gets in accidents, and even dies someday...
HUFF
HUFF
As I live...
...as I race...

KACHUK

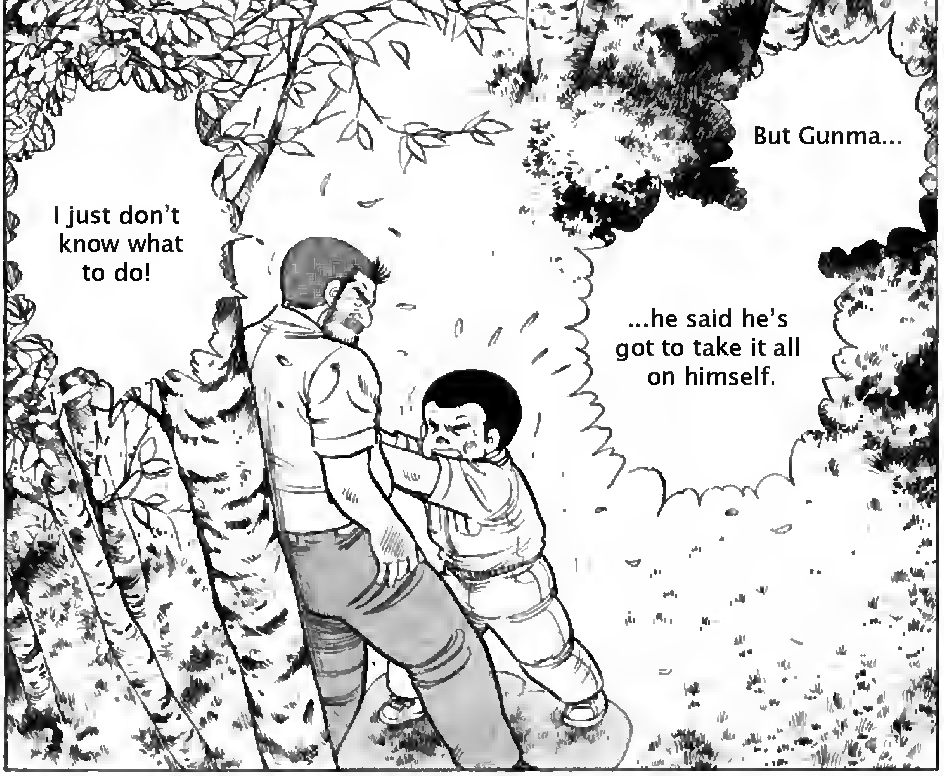

He won't be racing for a while.
He's suffered a pelvic contusion and a fractured femur.

He's finished.
At worst...?
At best, by next season... At worst...
I had mixed feelings to be honest.
Maybe I was wrong.
...!
Maybe I should've hid that article from him before the race.
Do what you want to me.
Have at it.
It's fine.
How can you...

I said have at it!
I may have stolen his dream away.
...

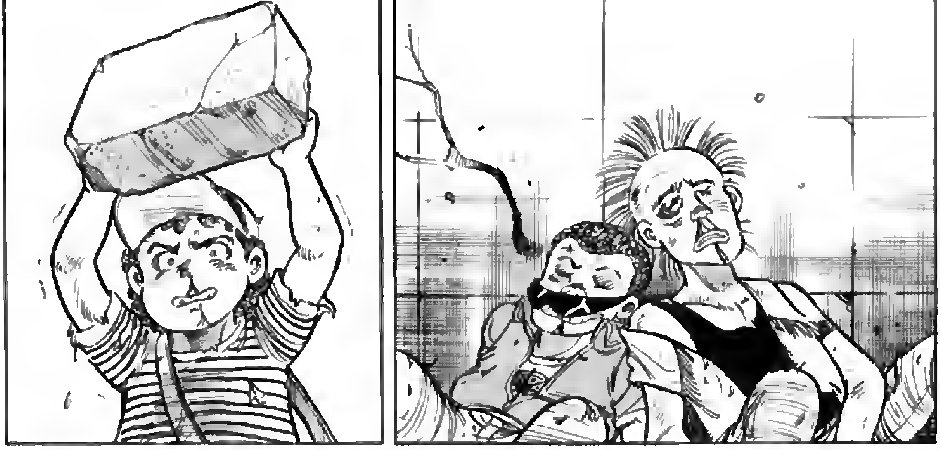

I...
ドゥン
THUD
Hyaaah!

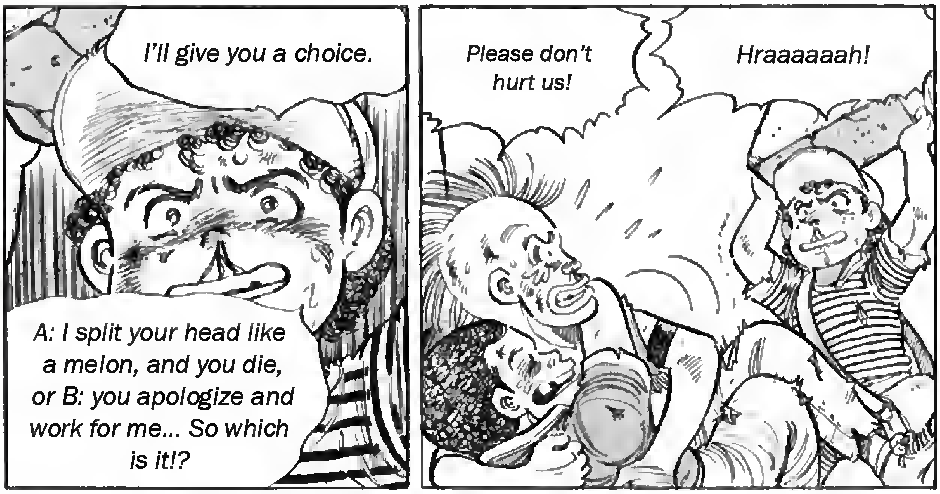
I can see what you're sayin'... Still, what you did was...
I can't understand your way of doing things...
I don't get it!
I just don't get it!


But Gunma...
I just don't know what to do!
...he said he's got to take it all on himself.

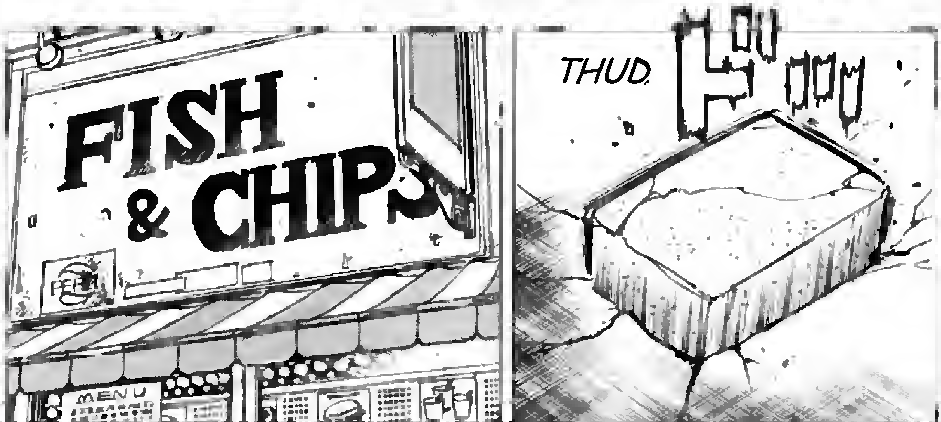
Tell me why, Orman!
Why does he still gotta race after all this happened!?

...
Why!?

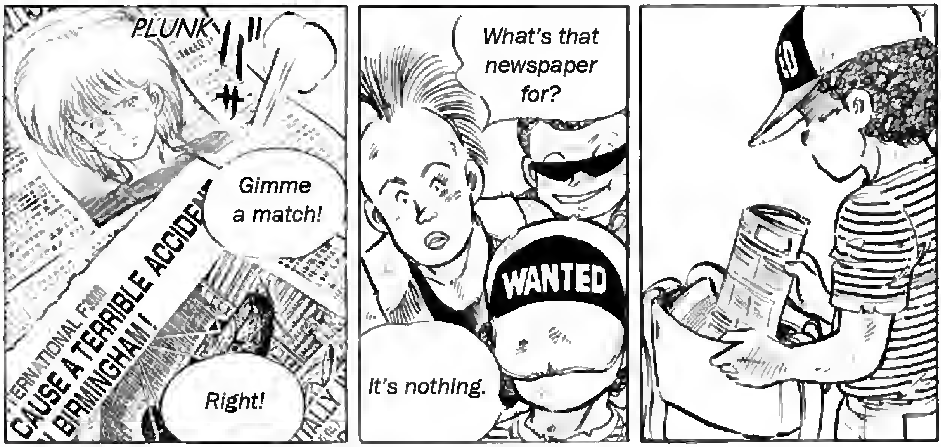


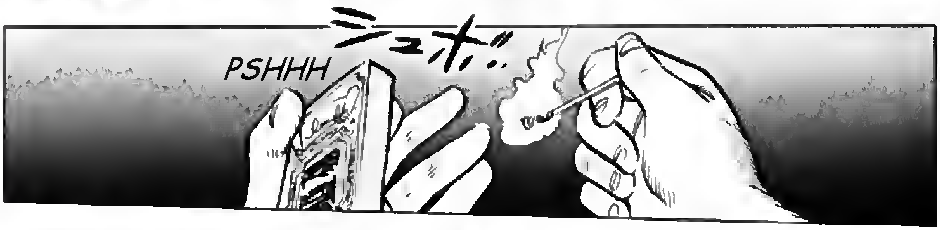

I'll give you a choice.
A: I split your head like a melon, and you die, or B: you apologize and work for me... So which is it!?
Please don't hurt us!
Hraaaaaah!

It's B!
B! We choose B!


FISH & CHIPS
MENU
THUD.

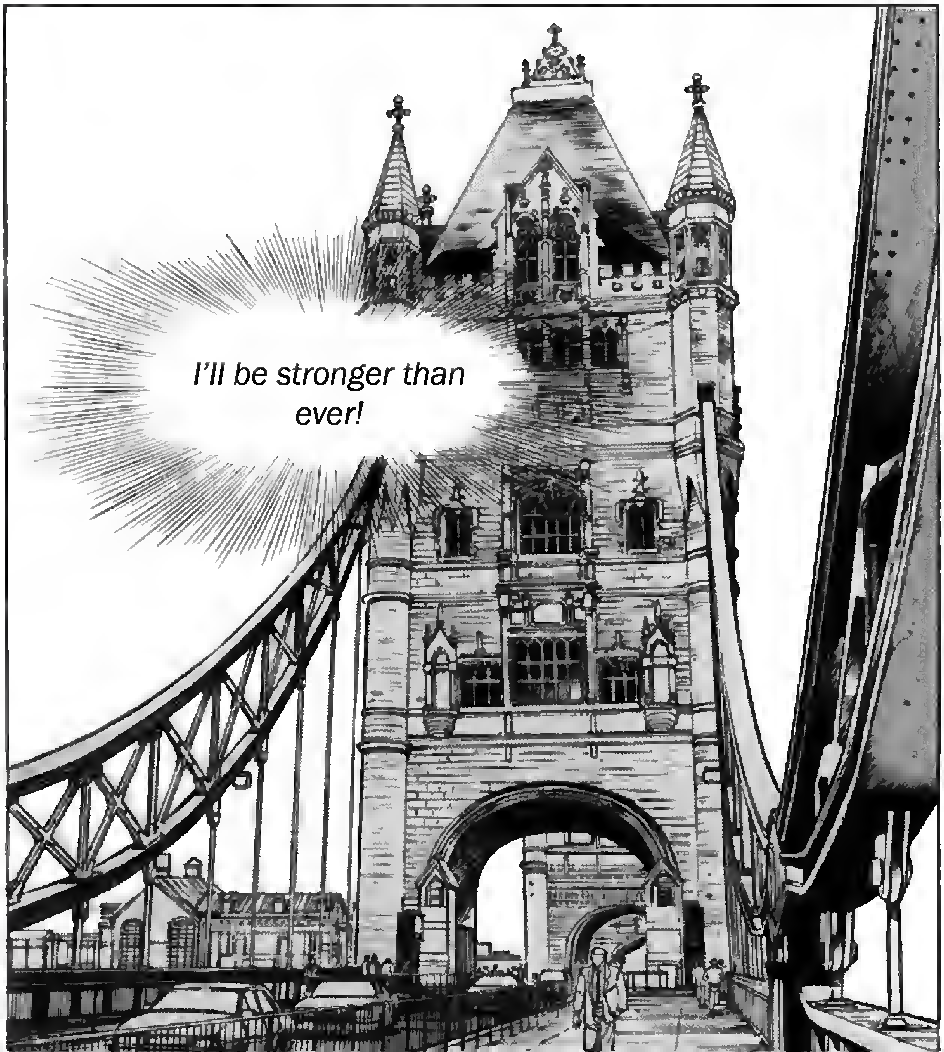
Together we're LonDon!
I'm Lon, and this is Don.
Nothing but respect for you!
Heh heh, you're the perfect leader, as strong as you are!
MUNCH
MUNCH


PLUNK
Gimme a match!
Right!
What's that newspaper for?
It's nothing.
WANTED

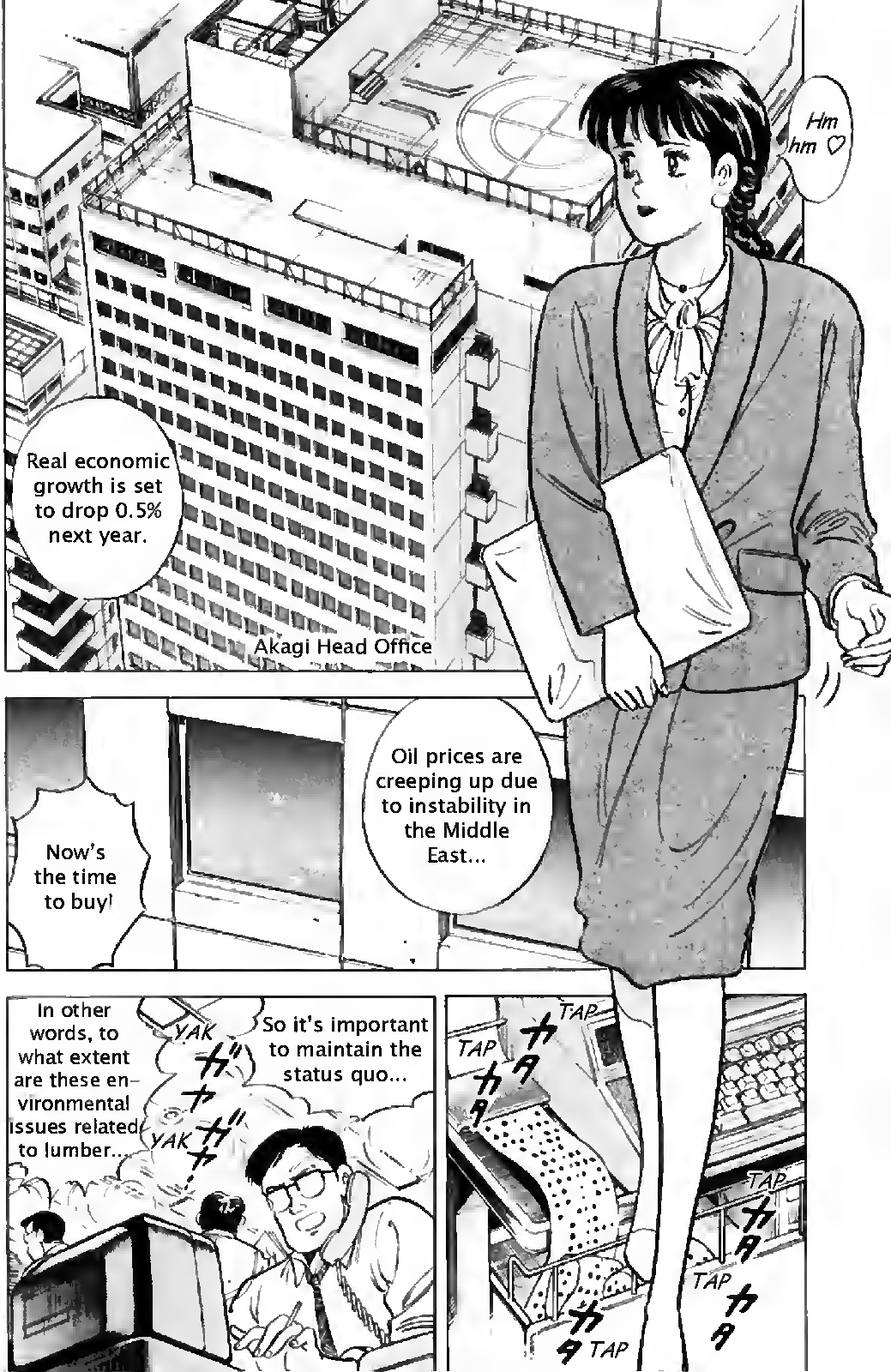

PSHHH

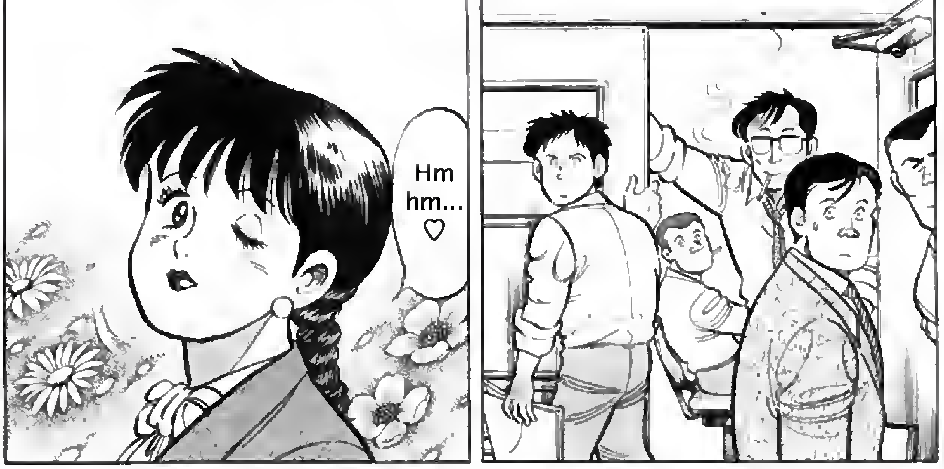
NTERNATIONAL F3000
CAUSE A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT
IN BIRMINGHAM!

Sako and Gunma are idiots.
It's time for me to grow up, and be strong.
I'll live on my own.
I'll even be a hoodlum if that's what it takes to survive!


I'll be stronger than ever!

Chapter 9:
Field Work


Hm hm ♡
Real economic growth is set to drop 0.5% next year.
Akagi Head Office
Now's the time to buy!
Oil prices are creeping up due to instability in the Middle East...
In other words, to what extent are these environmental issues related to lumber...
YAK
YAK
So it's important to maintain the status quo...
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP

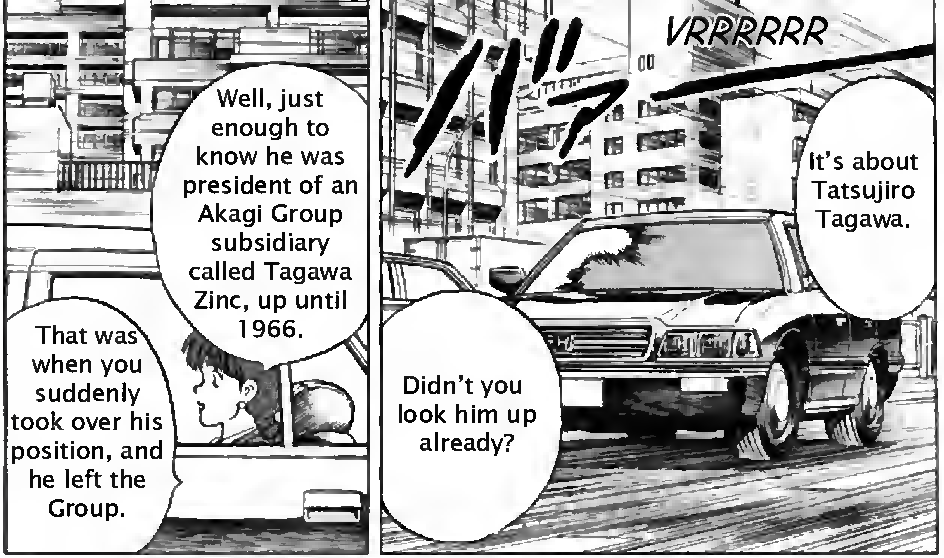

Hm hm... ♡

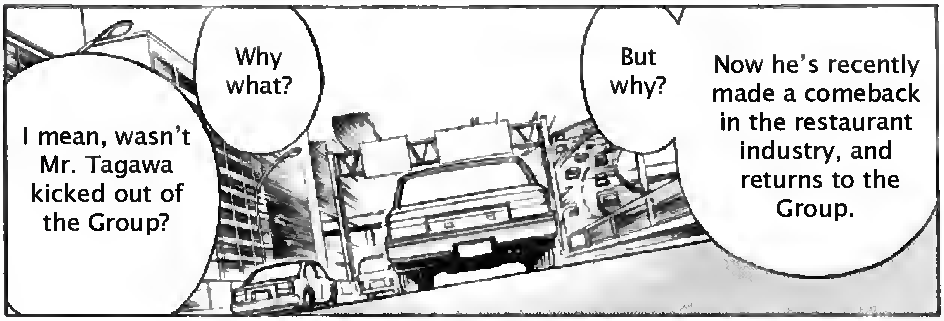
A new employee at this time of year?
Ooh baby.
Who's she?
She has freckles.

WHIRL
BANG

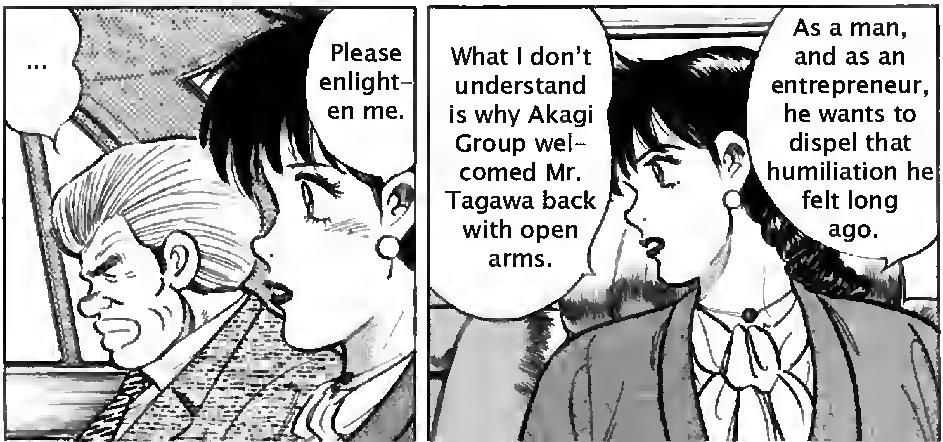
I'll go with you, sir!
I'm leaving now.
Yes?
Toyota.

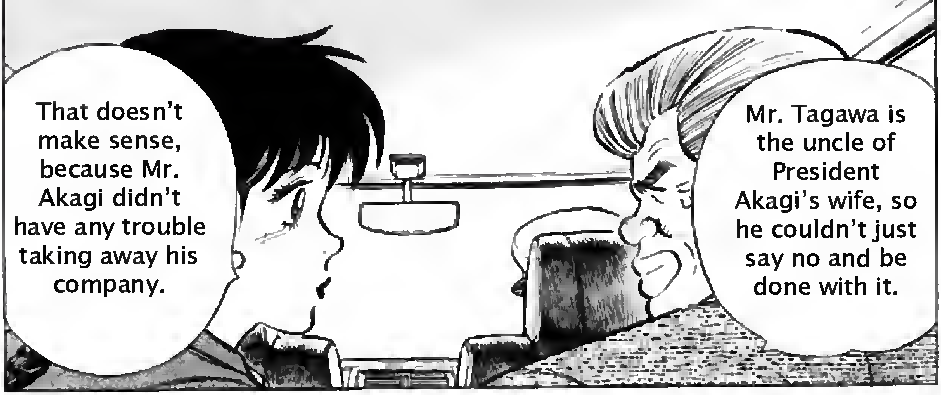
KACHUK
But you haven't taught me a lick about the schedule!
Ha ha ha! Forgive me. I'm just used to working independently.
Where are we going?
Aren't you my secretary?
You don't trust me, do you.
Well, you still don't trust me completely either.
Can I ask you a question, sir?
Sure, ask away.

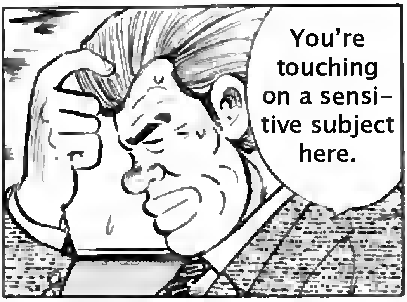

Well, just enough to know he was president of an Akagi Group subsidiary called Tagawa Zinc, up until 1966.
That was when you suddenly took over his position, and he left the Group.
VRRRRRR
It's about Tatsujiro Tagawa.
Didn't you look him up already?


Why what?
I mean, wasn't Mr. Tagawa kicked out of the Group?
But why?
Now he's recently made a comeback in the restaurant industry, and returns to the Group.

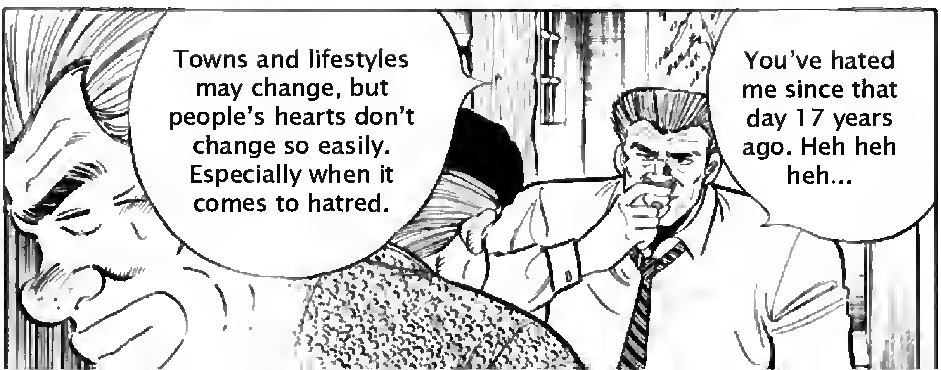
That's why I can understand his ambition, to take control of the Group.
His company was taken away from him, so there must have been some ill will there.
Not exactly. He left of his own accord.


...
Please enlighten me.
What I don't understand is why Akagi Group welcomed Mr. Tagawa back with open arms.
As a man, and as an entrepreneur, he wants to dispel that humiliation he felt long ago.


That doesn't make sense, because Mr. Akagi didn't have any trouble taking away his company.
Mr. Tagawa is the uncle of President Akagi's wife, so he couldn't just say no and be done with it.

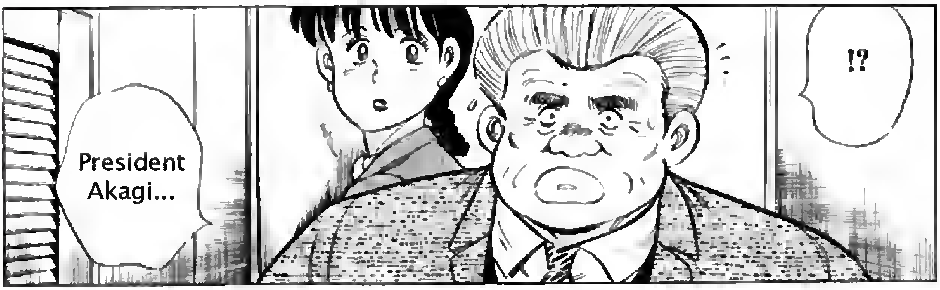

You're touching on a sensitive subject here.

I'll show you how to live a first-rate life!
From now on, your life is mine.
So come with me!


Towns and lifestyles may change, but people's hearts don't change so easily. Especially when it comes to hatred.
You've hated me since that day 17 years ago. Heh heh heh...

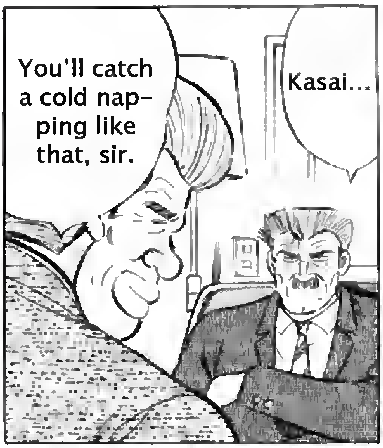
...
You once told me you'd give me one of your subsidiaries, that I could choose any one of them.
I'd like to take over Tagawa Zinc.
But why...
So I'm hoping you'll stay true to that promise you made 17 years ago.
When it comes to hatred...
Why did I choose Tagawa's company back then?
...the heart won't change so easily.

502
Excuse me,sir.

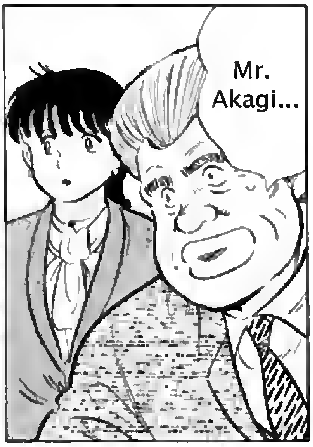

President Akagi...
!?

Snorrrrrrre
Snorrrrre

Snorrr rre...
Snorrrrre...


You'll catch a cold nap-ping like that, sir.
Kasai...

HMP


Mr. Akagi...

I wasn't napping, just thinking.

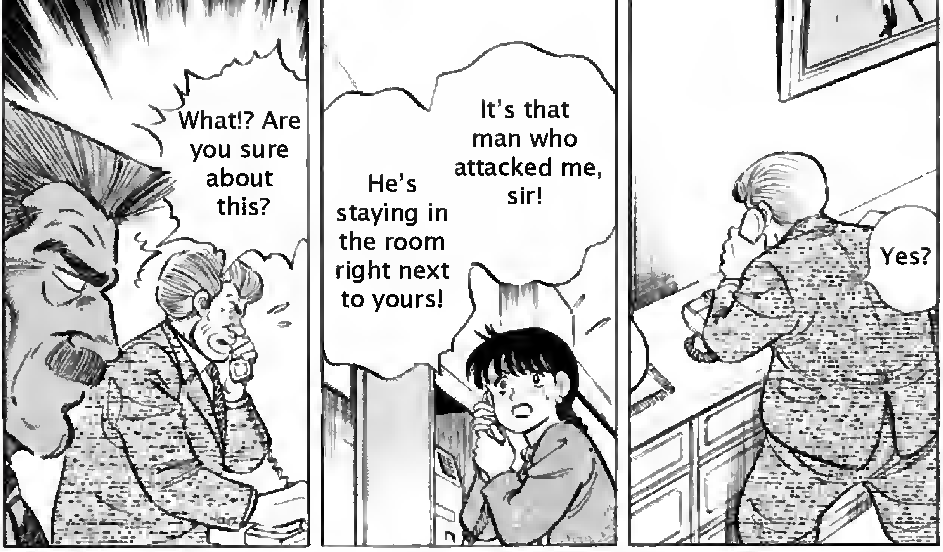
Go wait in the lobby.

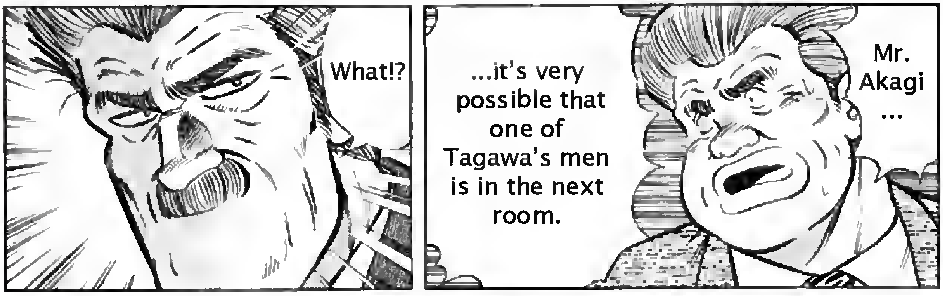
GLARE

Yeah right. You were snoring like a bear.
...

The girl that discovered my accident. I decided to make her my secretary.
Hmm... Older men tend to fall for younger women. It's proof you're aging.
Who's she?
Well...
Maybe I really do hate him...
Don't be ridiculous, I'm still quite young.
Not as much as you, sir.
Let's have some tea first.
Sure.
I wanted to talk to you about our land purchase in Rokkasho Village.
But I respect the hell out of him, and want him to succeed!

YAK
YAK
Room 503 please.
YAK
YAK
It's him.
And he just said Room 503.
Without a doubt, that's the man who was after me.

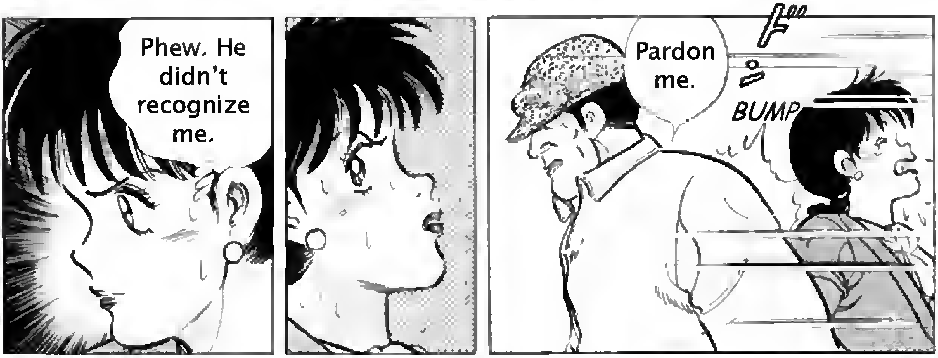

What!? Are you sure about this?
He's staying in the room right next to yours!
It's that man who attacked me, sir!
Yes?

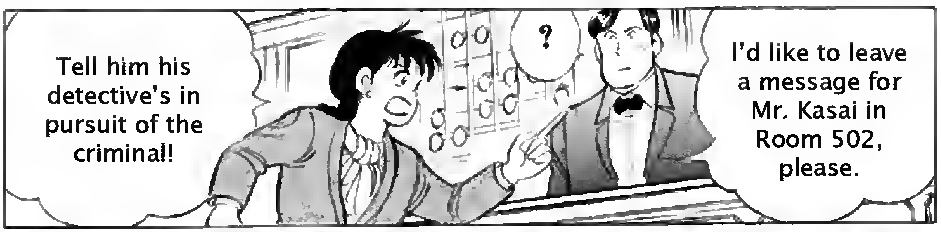

What!?
...it's very possible that one of Tagawa's men is in the next room.
Mr. Akagi ...

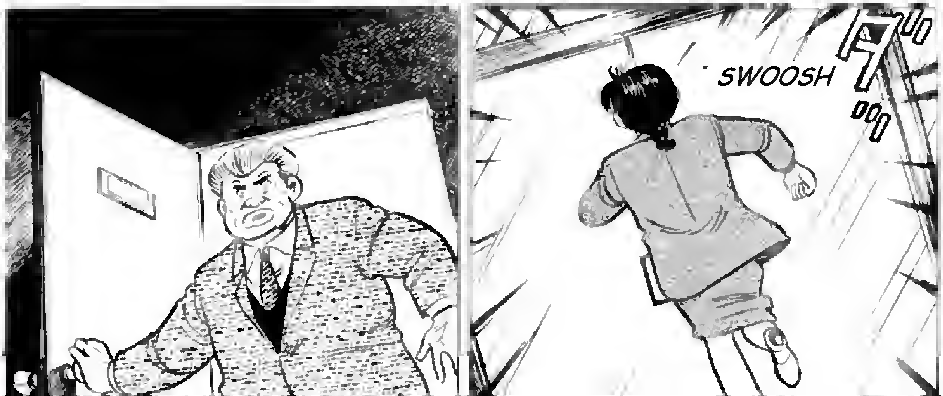
KACHIK
Someone might've told him we're meeting with the presidents here today!
This place could be bugged. Take a look around.

Found it!
THUNK
FWOOP
...!?
Krrr rrrr
KACHUK
BING

FWOOP
Ahh!

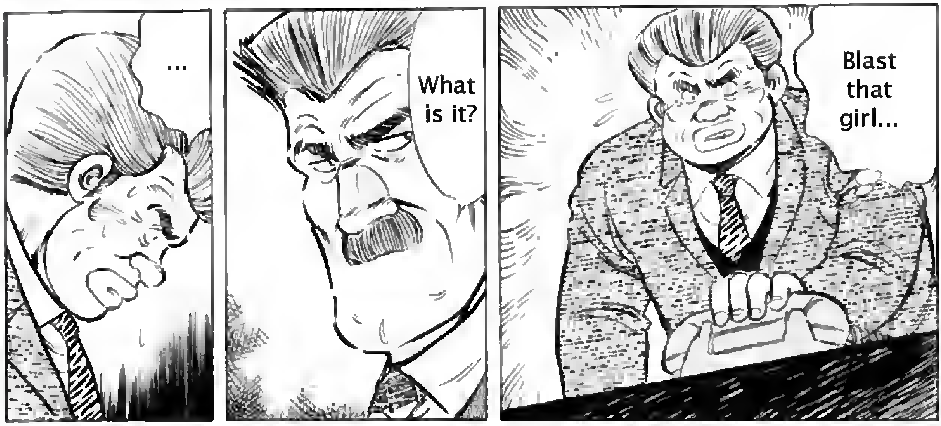

Phew. He didn't recognize me.
Pardon me.
BUMP


Tell him his detective's in pursuit of the criminal!
?
I'd like to leave a message for Mr. Kasai in Room 502, please.


SWOOSH

RRR-
Hmm ...
Seems we just missed him.

"Your detective's in pursuit of the criminal..."
A young woman just left you a message, sir.

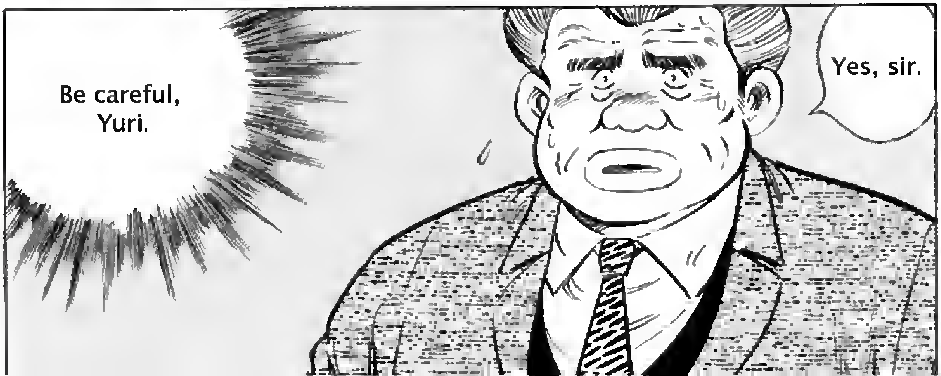

...
What is it?
Blast that girl...

VRRRRRRRR

VROOOOOOH

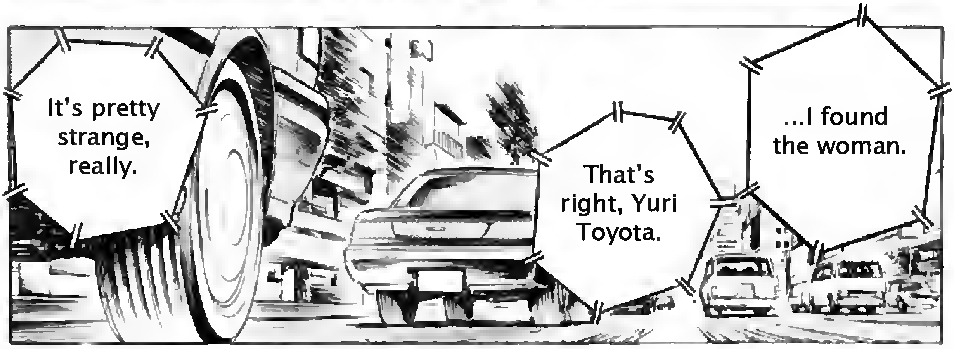
Do what it takes to stay on his tail!
I'm about to blow your cover, fish lips!
Heh heh heh...
Isn't that something...
Looks like I hit the jackpot.
Wait a minute... That's Yuri Toyota!
The woman from the elevator.
!?

...to meet with the presidents from our weekly meeting, one at a time, and find out if they're with me or Tagawa.
The time has come...

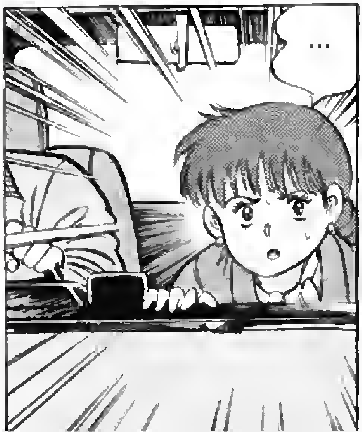

Be careful, Yuri.
Yes, sir.

Chapter 10:
Hot Pursuit
Wrangler

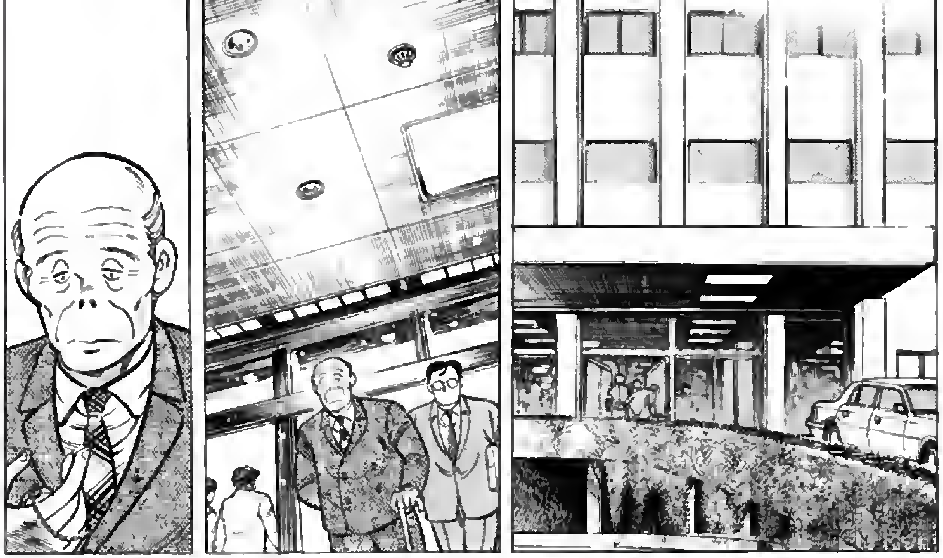
Mr. Tagawa? It's me, sir.
They found the bug, sir. I'm sorry.
But still...

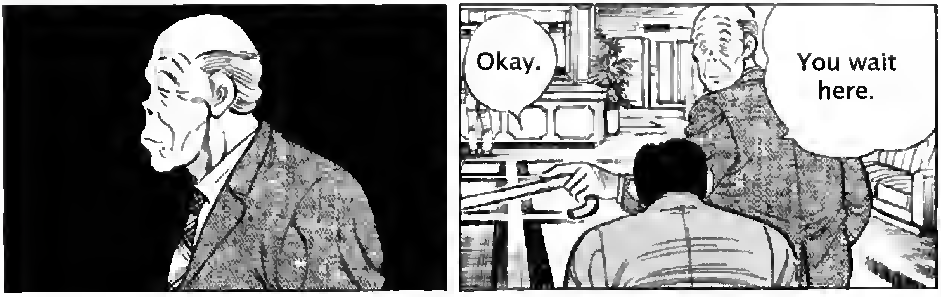

It's pretty strange, really.
That's right, Yuri Toyota.
...I found the woman.

I'm thinking she may have Kida's tape and those pictures after all.
Instead of disappearing at the first sign of danger...
...it seems she's been snooping around.

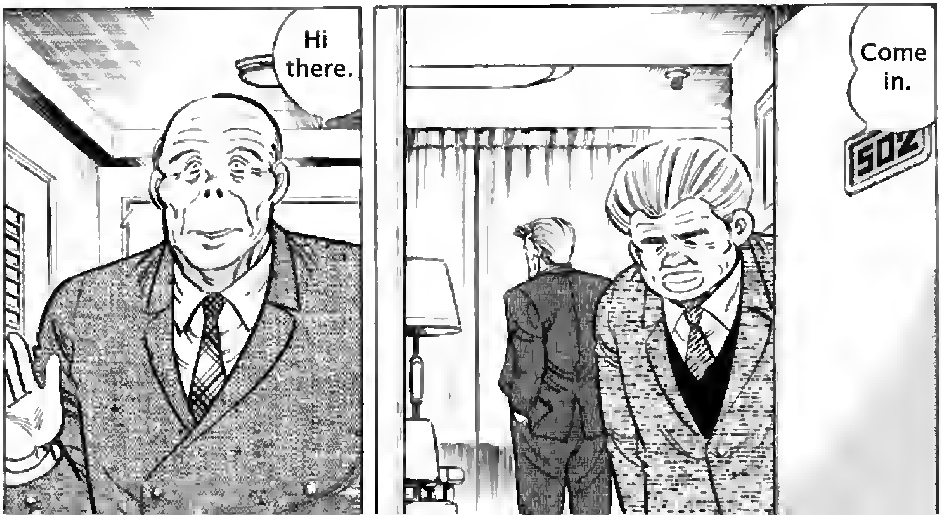

...

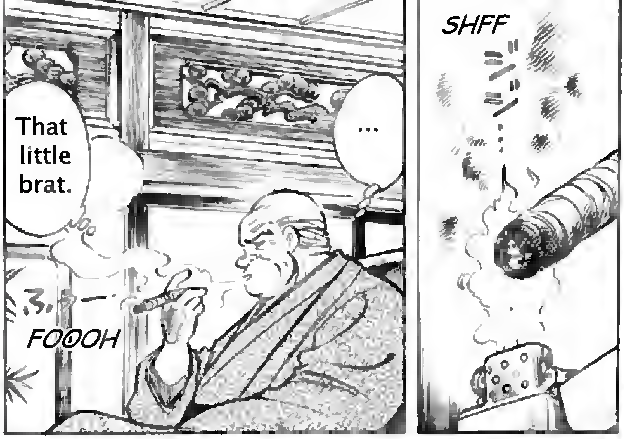
Yes, sir. Rest assured, I'll get her this time.
Right. That's the spot.



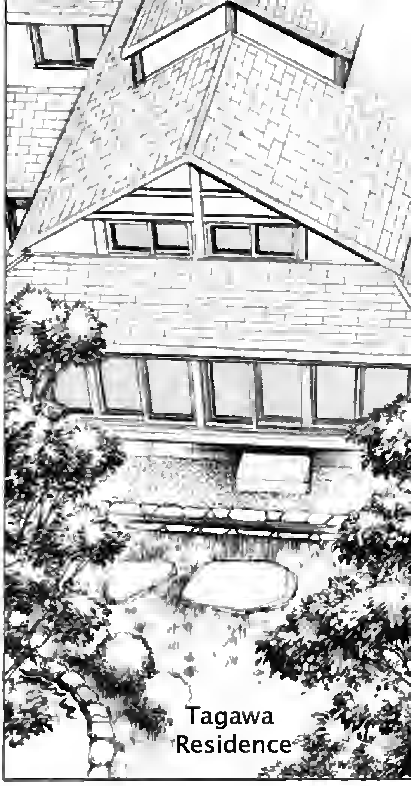

Okay.
You wait here.

502
KNOCK
KNOCK

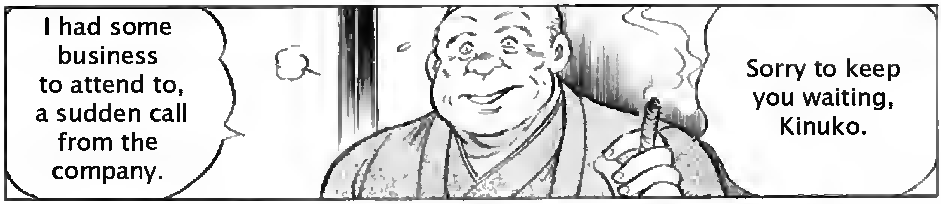

Hi there.
Come in.
502

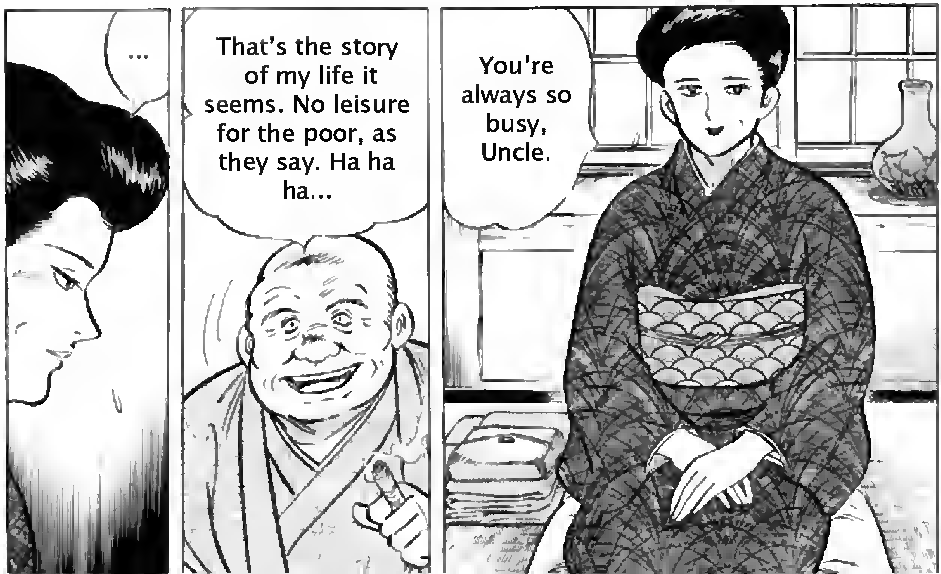

That little brat.
...
FOOOH

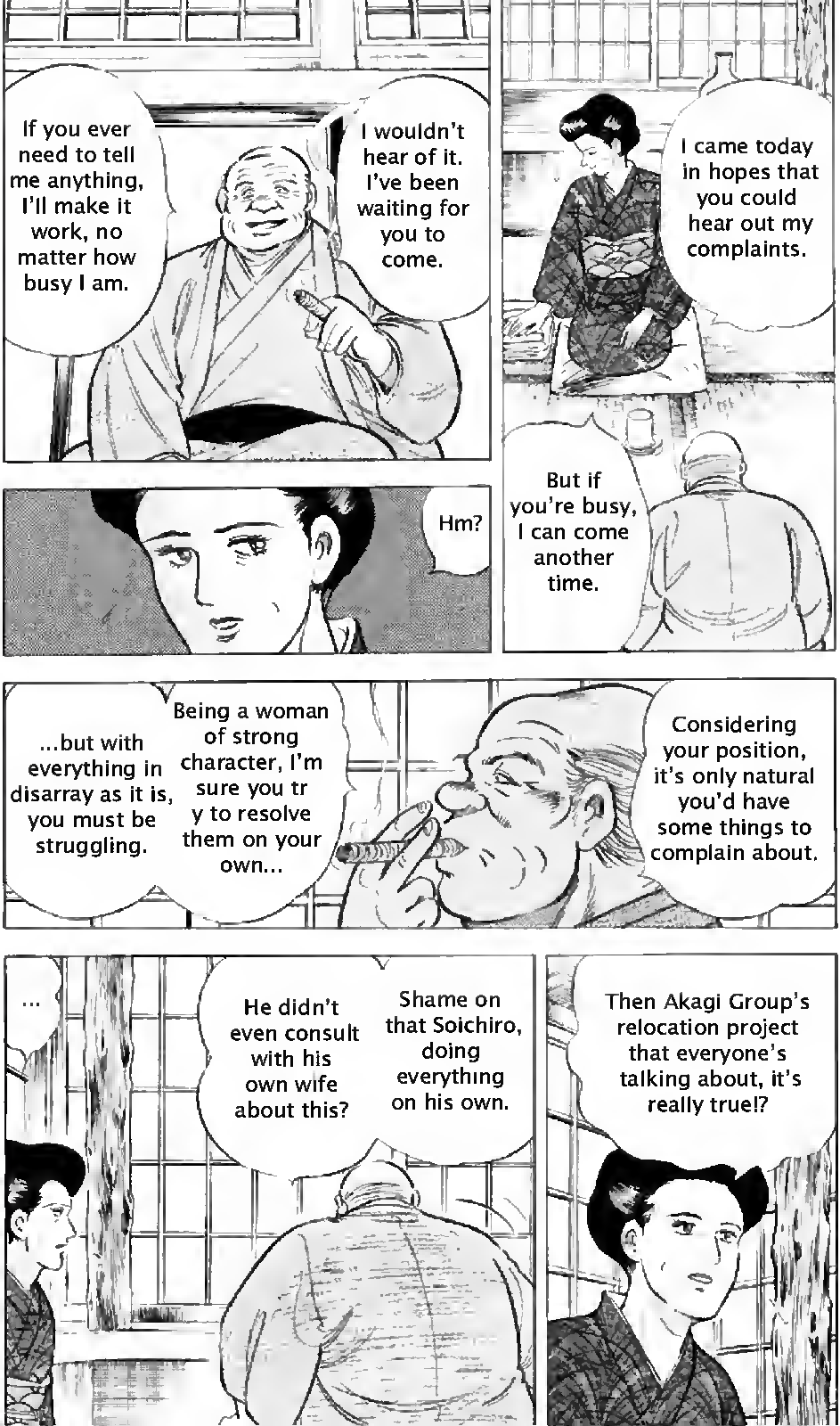
SHFF

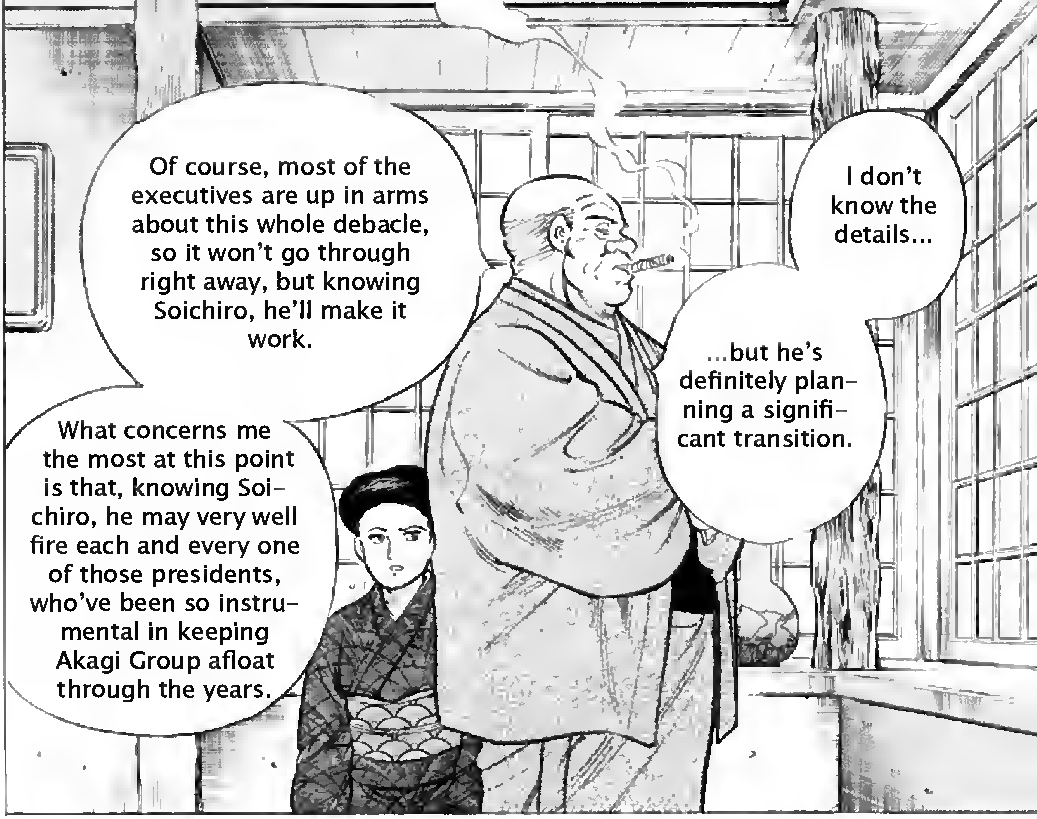

Tagawa Residence

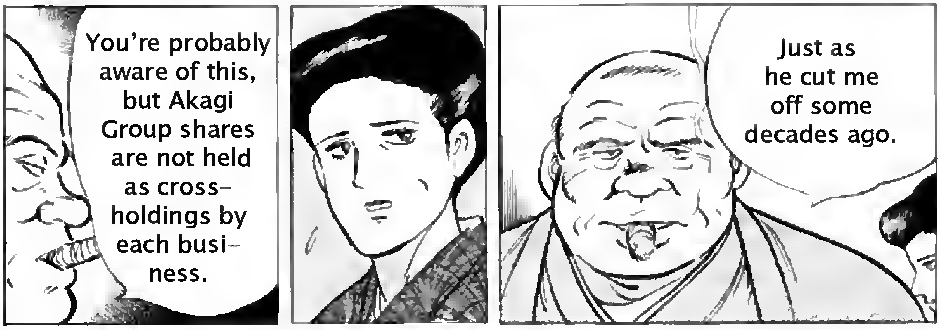
Oh yes, yes.
Mrs. Akagi is waiting, sir.

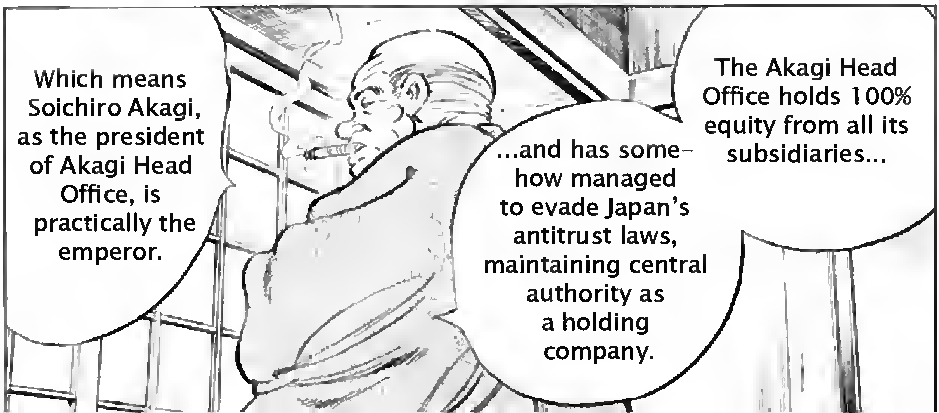

I had some business to attend to, a sudden call from the company.
Sorry to keep you waiting, Kinuko.

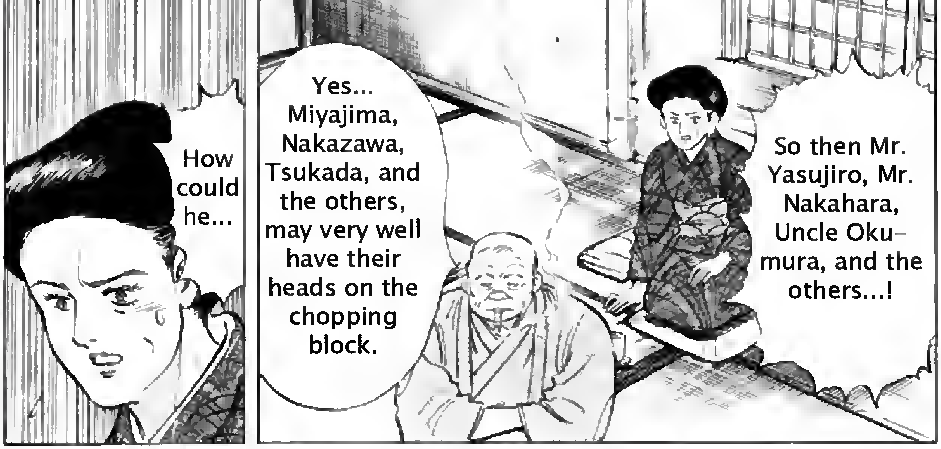

...
That's the story of my life it seems. No leisure for the poor, as they say. Ha ha ha...
You're always so busy, Uncle.


If you ever need to tell me anything, I'll make it work, no matter how busy I am.
I wouldn't hear of it. I've been waiting for you to come.
I came today in hopes that you could hear out my complaints.
But if you're busy, I can come another time.
Hm?
...but with everything in disarray as it is, you must be struggling.
Being a woman of strong character, I'm sure you tr y to resolve them on your own...
Considering your position, it's only natural you'd have some things to complain about.
...
He didn't even consult with his own wife about this?
Shame on that Soichiro, doing everything on his own.
Then Akagi Group's relocation project that everyone's talking about, it's really true!?


Of course, most of the executives are up in arms about this whole debacle, so it won't go through right away, but knowing Soichiro, he'll make it work.
I don't know the details...
...but he's definitely planning a significant transition.
What concerns me the most at this point is that, knowing Soichiro, he may very well fire each and every one of those presidents, who've been so instrumental in keeping Akagi Group afloat through the years.


You're probably aware of this, but Akagi Group shares are not held as cross-holdings by each business.
Just as he cut me off some decades ago.

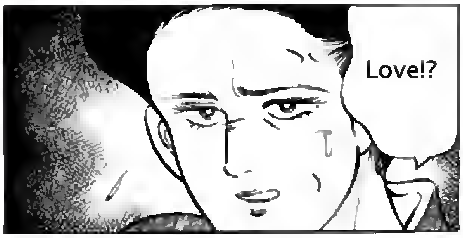

Which means Soichiro Akagi, as the president of Akagi Head Office, is practically the emperor.
...and has somehow managed to evade Japan's antitrust laws, maintaining central authority as a holding company.
The Akagi Head Office holds 100% equity from all its subsidiaries...


How could he...
Yes... Miyajima, Nakazawa, Tsukada, and the others, may very well have their heads on the chopping block.
So then Mr. Yasujiro, Mr. Nakahara, Uncle Okumura, and the others...!

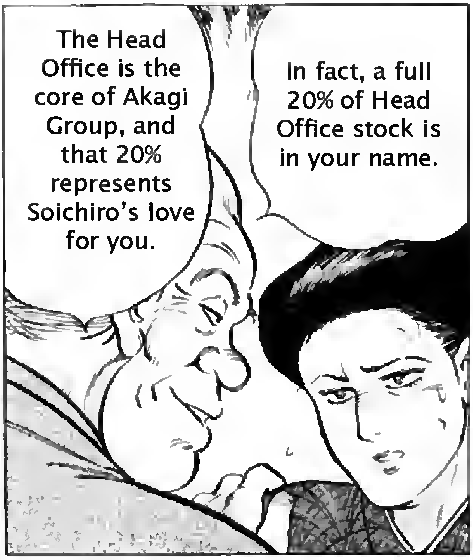
That Shizue.
It's that woman.
The nerve ...
He didn't tell me a word of this.

There, there. Just take it easy.
No Uncle!
She died long ago.
Please calm yourself, Kinuko.
She continues to live on in his heart.
The woman who gave birth to Gunma.

There's a silver lining in all this.
I believe Soichiro has shown that he trusts you as his beloved wife.
He has a good amount of stock in your name, for example...


Love!?

How could you call that love?
What a cold ...


In fact, a full 20% of Head Office stock is in your name.
The Head Office is the core of Akagi Group, and that 20% represents Soichiro's love for you.

Now wait!
That love, or shall we say that 20%, may just save the Akagi Head Office, and the entire Group for that matter!

...!

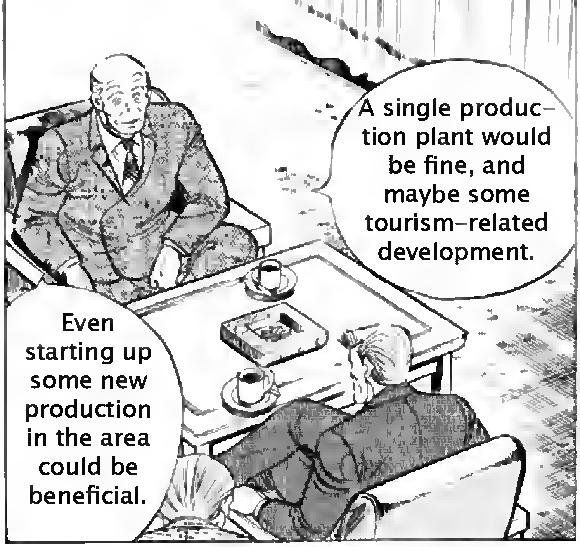
What!?
Soichiro has no intention of handing the Head Office over to Shoma.
And there's one more thing, which I know for certain.

For formality's sake, both Kasai and Shoma will hold some sort of "joint presidency" from what I've heard.
How could that...
He'd rather have old Kasai take the reins.

How can he humiliate us like this?
Does he have no concern for his own family, for his own flesh and blood?

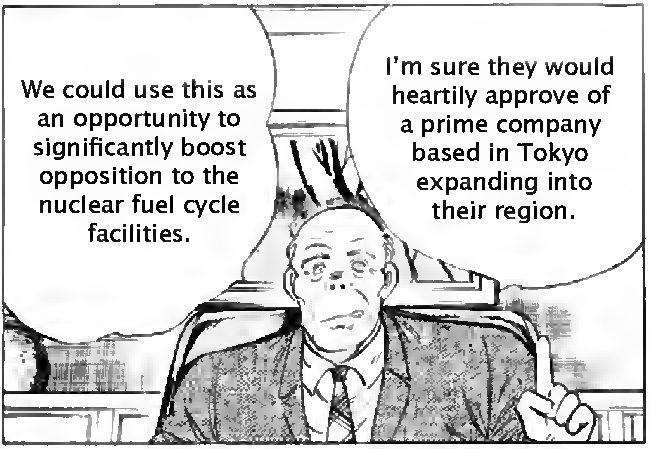
FOOOH

...is part of Mr. Tagawa's chain business.
So that man must be connected to Mr. Tagawa.
That restau-rant...
RESTAURANT
RoyalSun
24時間
Welcome.
This restaurant is all over Japan, after all.
VRRR
It could be a coinci-dence.
キィ…
IRRK
Driver, I'll get out here!
YAK
YAK
Welco-me!
Either way, I have to get to the bottom of this.
おそれいりますが
臨時休業
いたします
SORRY, WE'RE CLOSED
FLIP
おそれいりますが
臨時休業
いたします
SORRY, WE'RE CLOSED


A single production plant would be fine, and maybe some tourism-related development.
Even starting up some new production in the area could be beneficial.

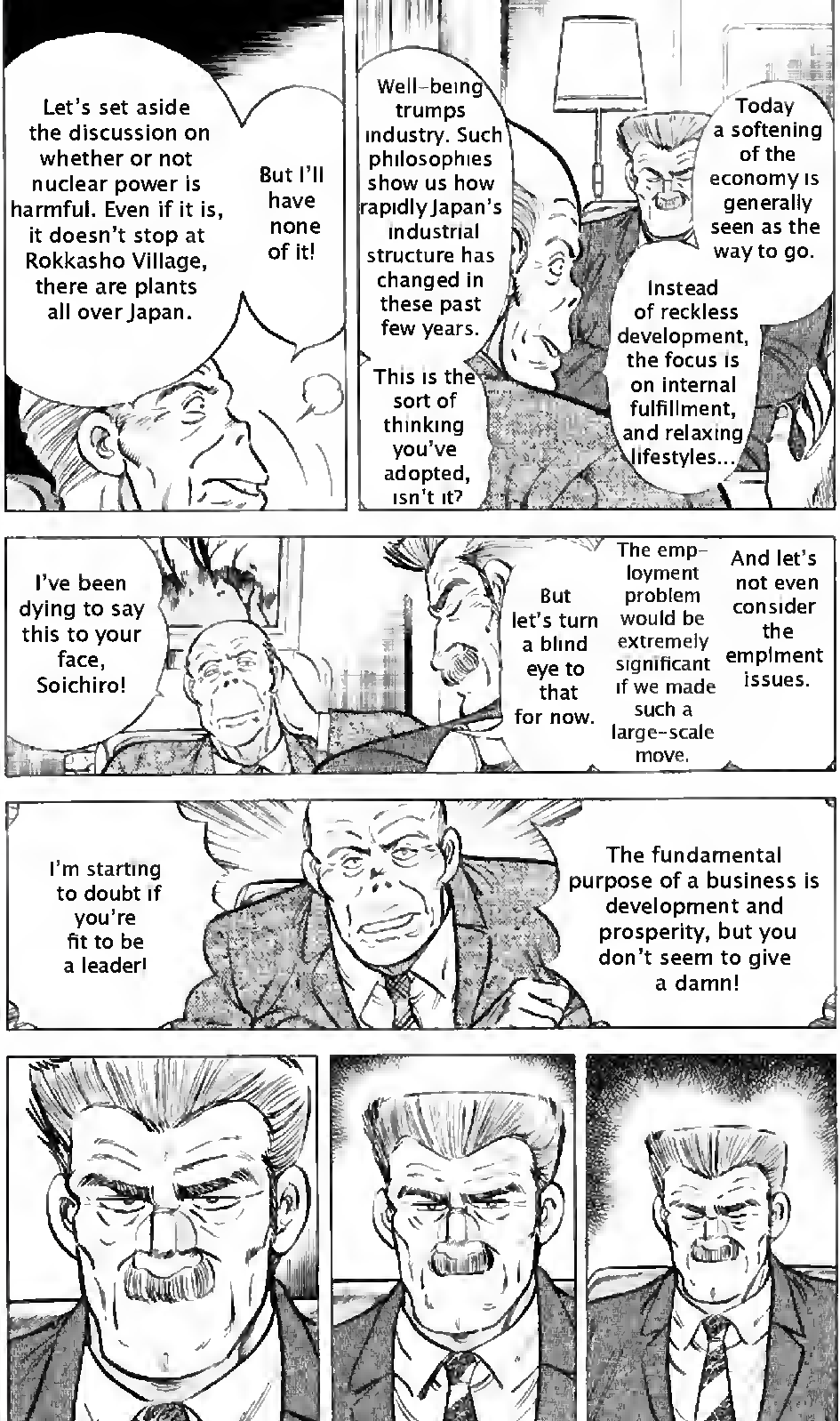
I just don't get where you're coming from with this.

Who wouldn't want our Group stimulating tourism and local industry, instead of catering to dangerous nuclear facilities?

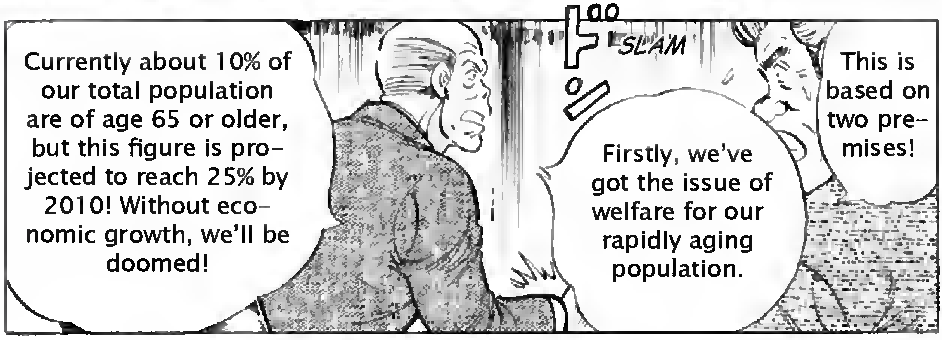

We could use this as an opportunity to significantly boost opposition to the nuclear fuel cycle facilities.
I'm sure they would heartily approve of a prime company based in Tokyo expanding into their region.

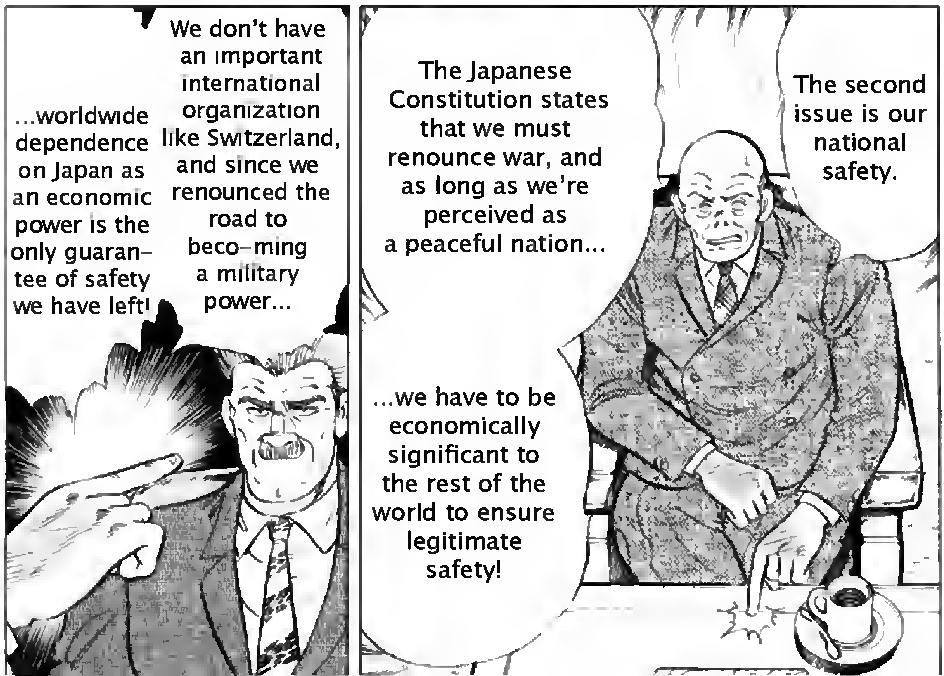
Akagi Group could be seen as a promoter of peace and safety, boosting our international reputation. Heh heh...
This could be appealing on a global level as well.

But we've also released a lot of pollution into the environment, and our country is viewed as an "economic animal" from the outside.
Japan has ridden a wave of rapid economic growth to develop immensely, with significant production pushing up our GNP.

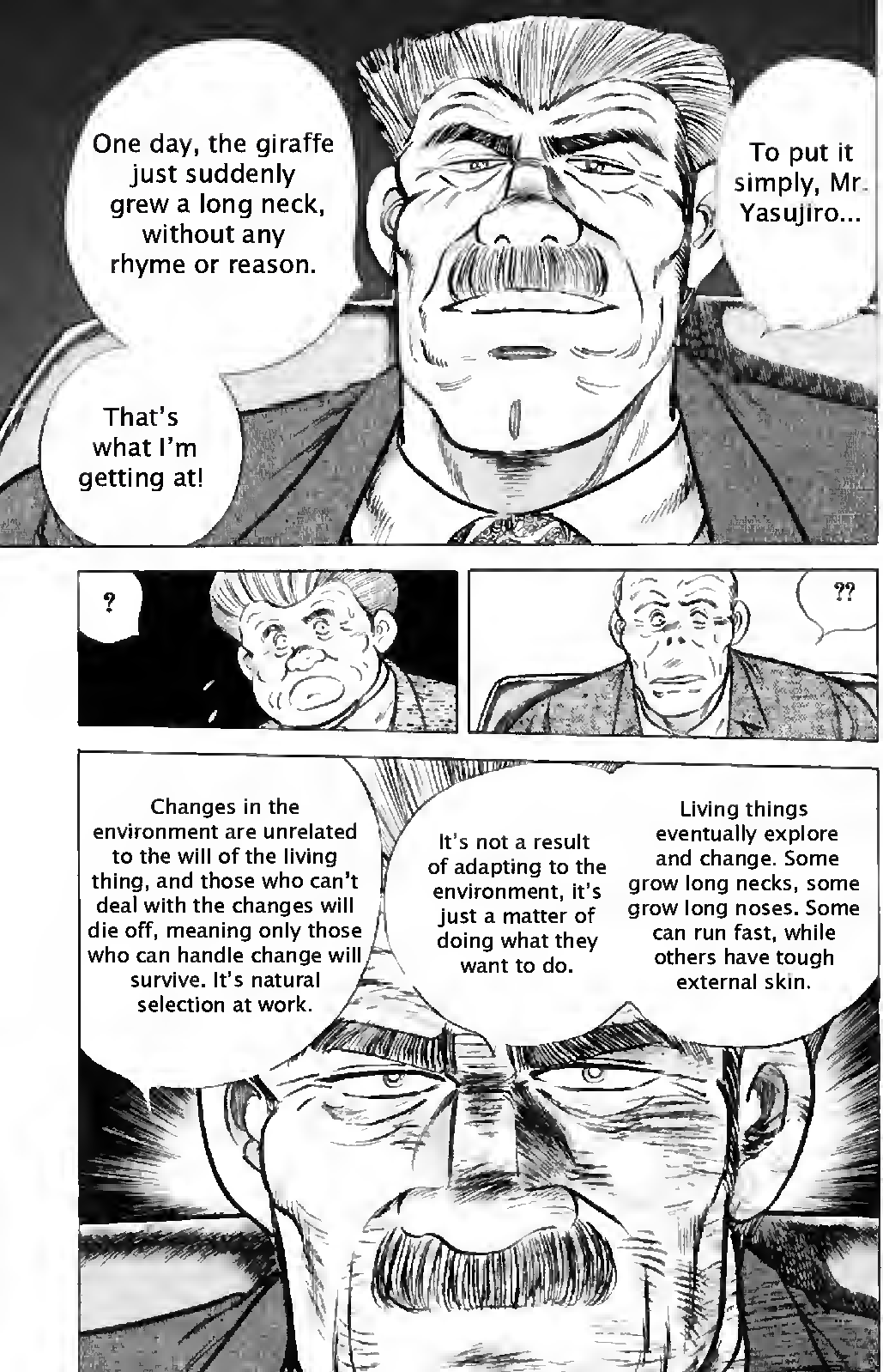

Let's set aside the discussion on whether or not nuclear power is harmful. Even if it is, it doesn't stop at Rokkasho Village, there are plants all over Japan.
But I'll have none of it!
Well-being trumps industry. Such philosophies show us how rapidly Japan's industrial structure has changed in these past few years.
This is the sort of thinking you've adopted, isn't it?
Today a softening of the economy is generally seen as the way to go.
Instead of reckless development, the focus is on internal fulfillment, and relaxing lifestyles...
I've been dying to say this to your face, Soichiro!
But let's turn a blind eye to that for now.
The employment problem would be extremely significant if we made such a large-scale move.
And let's not even consider the emplment issues.
I'm starting to doubt if you're fit to be a leader!
The fundamental purpose of a business is development and prosperity, but you don't seem to give a damn!

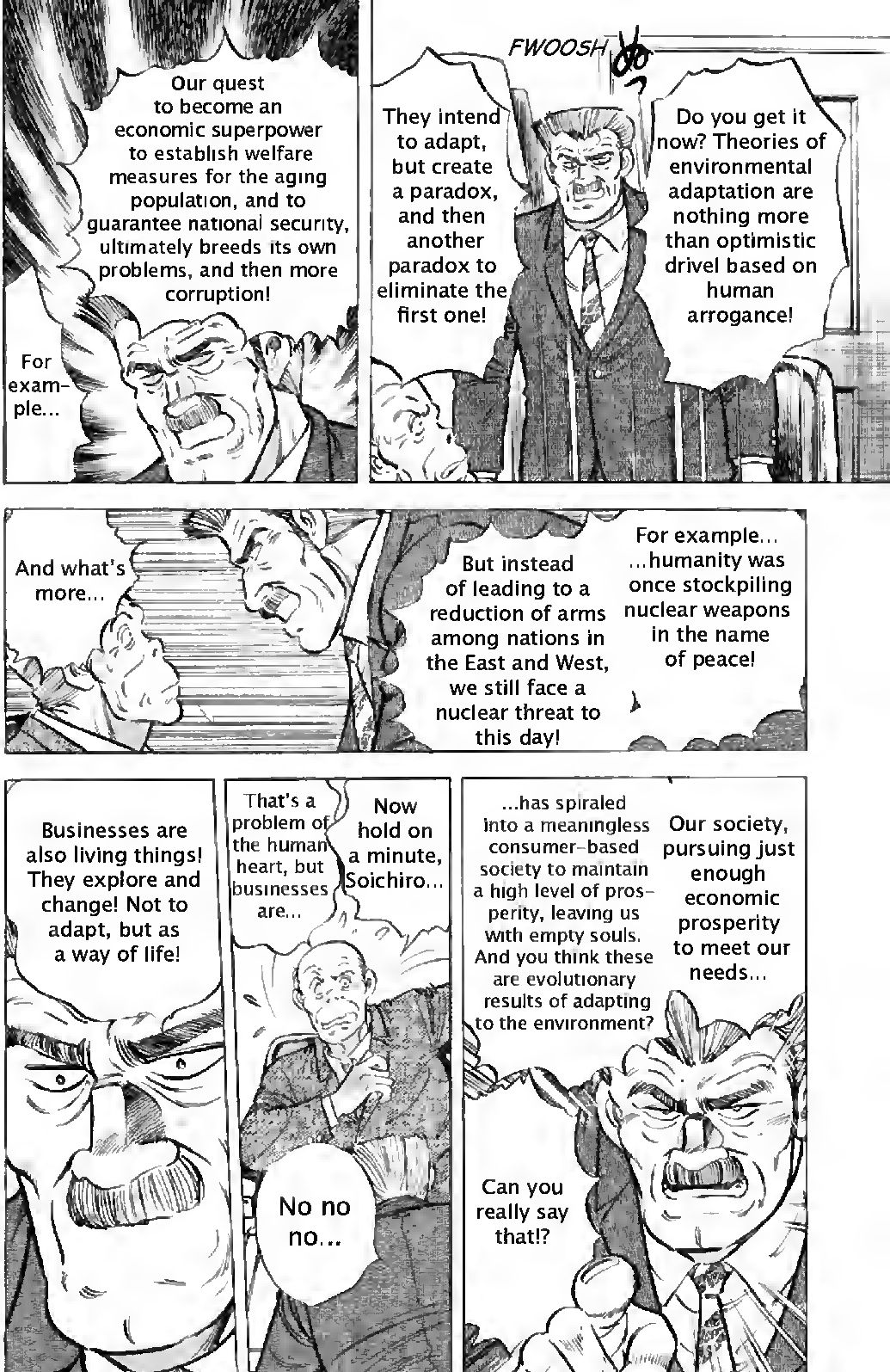
Well allow me to enlighten you, Soichiro! The Japanese economy has to keep growing to survive!
A new way of doing business!?
I'm not ignoring them, I'm simply looking for a new way of doing business from now on!


Currently about 10% of our total population are of age 65 or older, but this figure is projected to reach 25% by 2010! Without economic growth, we'll be doomed!
SLAM
Firstly, we've got the issue of welfare for our rapidly aging population.
This is based on two premises!

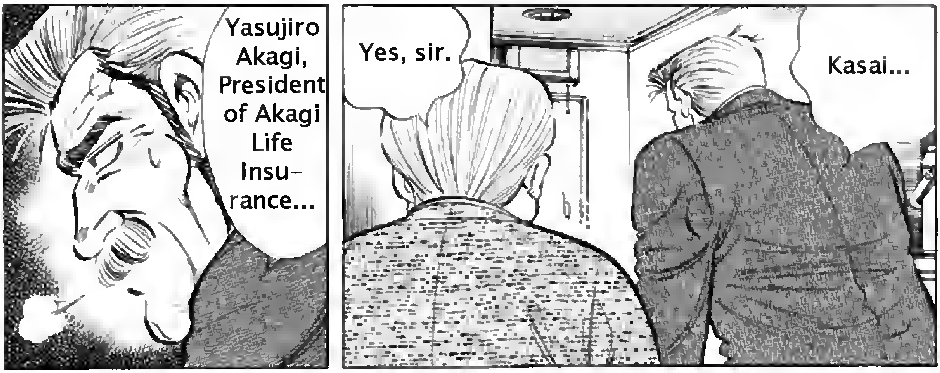

...worldwide dependence on Japan as an economic power is the only guarantee of safety we have left!
We don't have an important international organization like Switzerland, and since we renounced the road to becoming a military power...
The Japanese Constitution states that we must renounce war, and as long as we're perceived as a peaceful nation...
...we have to be economically significant to the rest of the world to ensure legitimate safety!
The second issue is our national safety.

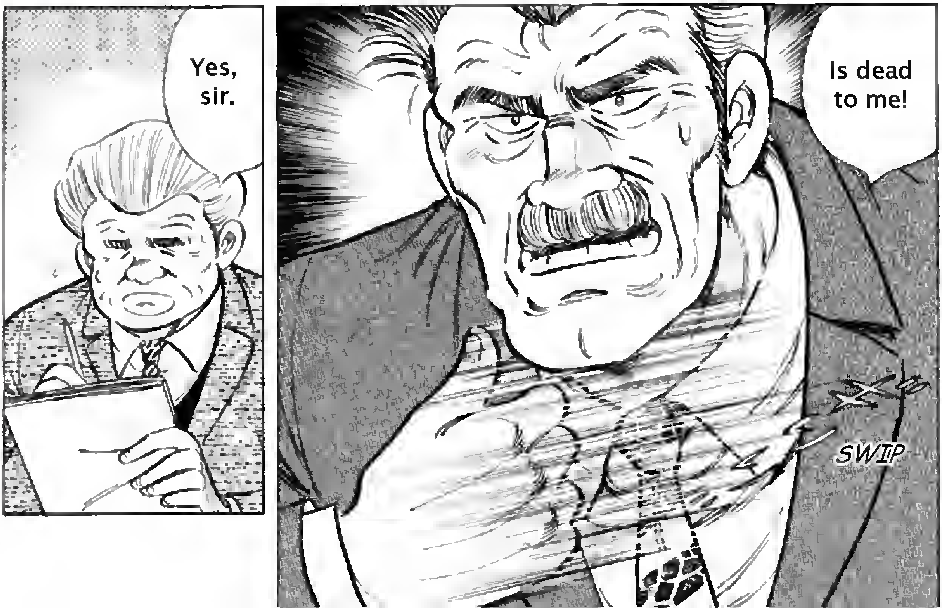
SHIVER
SHIVER
...
Interesting. I've learned a lot from our little talk.
And frankly, for someone in your position trying to venture into the world of politics...
...to not have a grasp of those funda-mentals is frighte-ning.
Hmph
Huh ...!?
...reminds me of Darwin's theory of evolution.
But the essence of what you're saying...
HM HM HM
Because according to the theory, it's adapted to an environment of tall trees.
Why is the giraffe's neck so long?
What on earth do you mean by that!?
What the hell are you get-ting at!?
Today the theory of sudden mu-tation holds more water as a method of biological evolution.
But that's nothing more than a just-so story, based on pure speculation!


One day, the giraffe just suddenly grew a long neck, without any rhyme or reason.
That's what I'm getting at!
To put it simply, Mr. Yasujiro...
?
??
Changes in the environment are unrelated to the will of the living thing, and those who can't deal with the changes will die off, meaning only those who can handle change will survive. It's natural selection at work.
It's not a result of adapting to the environment, it's just a matter of doing what they want to do.
Living things eventually explore and change. Some grow long necks, some grow long noses. Some can run fast, while others have tough external skin.


Our quest to become an economic superpower to establish welfare measures for the aging population, and to guarantee national security, ultimately breeds its own problems, and then more corruption!
For example...
FWOOSH
They intend to adapt, but create a paradox, and then another paradox to eliminate the first one!
Do you get it now? Theories of environmental adaptation are nothing more than optimistic drivel based on human arrogance!
And what's more...
But instead of leading to a reduction of arms among nations in the East and West, we still face a nuclear threat to this day!
For example... ...humanity was once stockpiling nuclear weapons in the name of peace!
Businesses are also living things! They explore and change! Not to adapt, but as a way of life!
That's a problem of the human heart, but businesses are...
Now hold on a minute, Soichiro...
No no no...
...has spiraled into a meaningless consumer-based society to maintain a high level of prosperity, leaving us with empty souls. And you think these are evolutionary results of adapting to the environment?
Our society, pursuing just enough economic prosperity to meet our needs...
Can you really say that!?

SLAM
I can't go along with this craziness!
Good day to you!
GRIP
I...
I want you to think of Akagi Group as undergoing a new mutation!


Yasujiro Akagi, President of Akagi Life Insurance...
Yes, sir.
Kasai...


Yes, sir.
Is dead to me!
SWIP

HUSHHH
Huh?
No more customers are coming in.

Chapter 11:
Beam of Light

HUSHHH

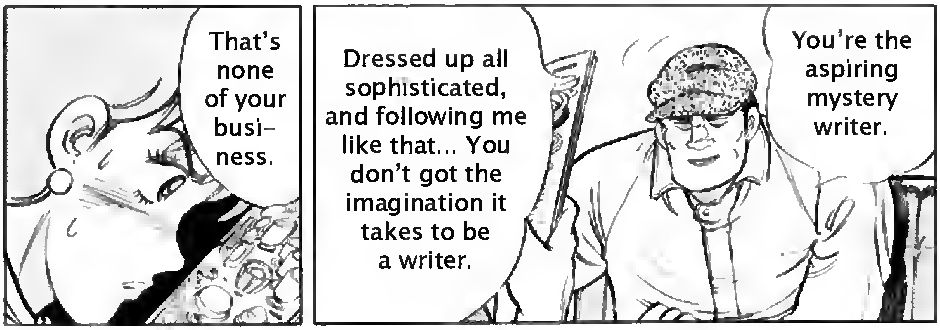
HUSHHH

This is weird. All the other customers are gone now.
Me and him are the only ones left.

...I stick out like a sore thumb.
Oh no...

FWIP
GASP
MENU
He's looking at me and smiling!
Maybe he knows I'm following him!
Hm hm...
With all this makeup on.
No, that couldn't be. He didn't recognize me at the hotel.
GRIN
Oh no... He got up.
And he's coming over here!
TUNK

Broads are like shape-shifters.
A little girl like you, all gussied up like a grown woman...
I almost didn't recognize you.
ガーン!
SHOCK
MENU


You're the aspiring mystery writer.
Dressed up all sophisticated, and following me like that... You don't got the imagination it takes to be a writer.
That's none of your busi-ness.

So tell me exactly what you found out.
And give me back whatever it is you picked up at the accident.
Um, I think you've got the wrong person.
I have no idea what you're talking about.

GRIP

...or I'll permanently rearrange your face.
Listen to me like a good kid...
Don't mess around with me, girlie.

Oww...
Ah...

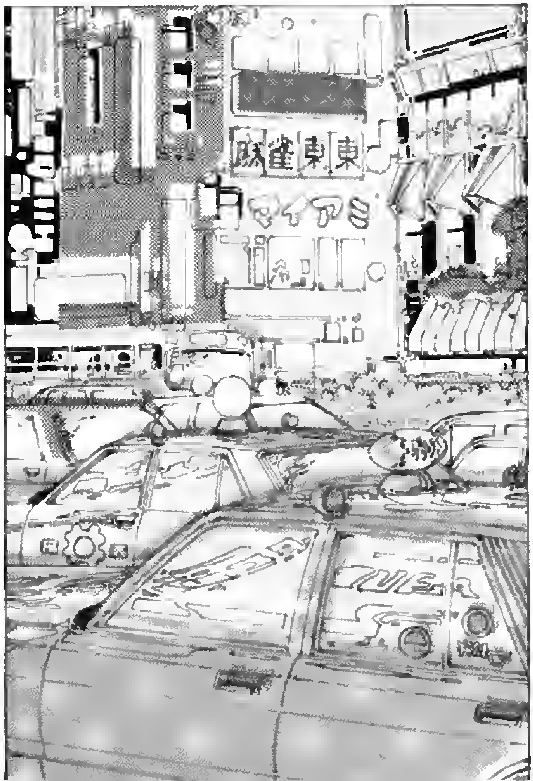
HONK
Royal Sun
Royal Sun
VRRRRR

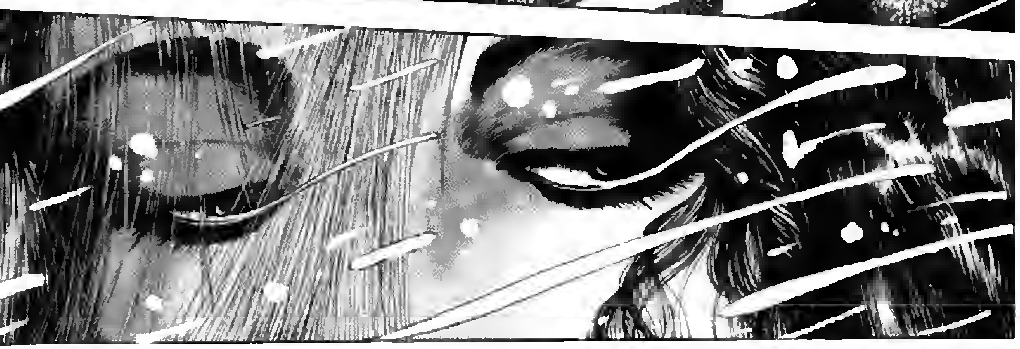
...but I'm not going anywhere!
I don't know what you're so restless about...
This is an outrage!
Yes, that's right!
Is that right, Mr. Miyaji-ma?
Check ...
Is fired!
SWIFF
Rokuro Miyajima, President of Akagi Paper Manufac-turing...
SLAM
...
...
SWIFF
We need to hold a presidents' meeting, to see where everyone stands on this!

SWIFF
...

SWIFF
Ha ha ha ha! That's absurd!

赤木生命社長
赤木製紙社長
鉱業社長
中原康
塚田博
小笠原孝
松本博
小内邦
日崎孝之
島隆

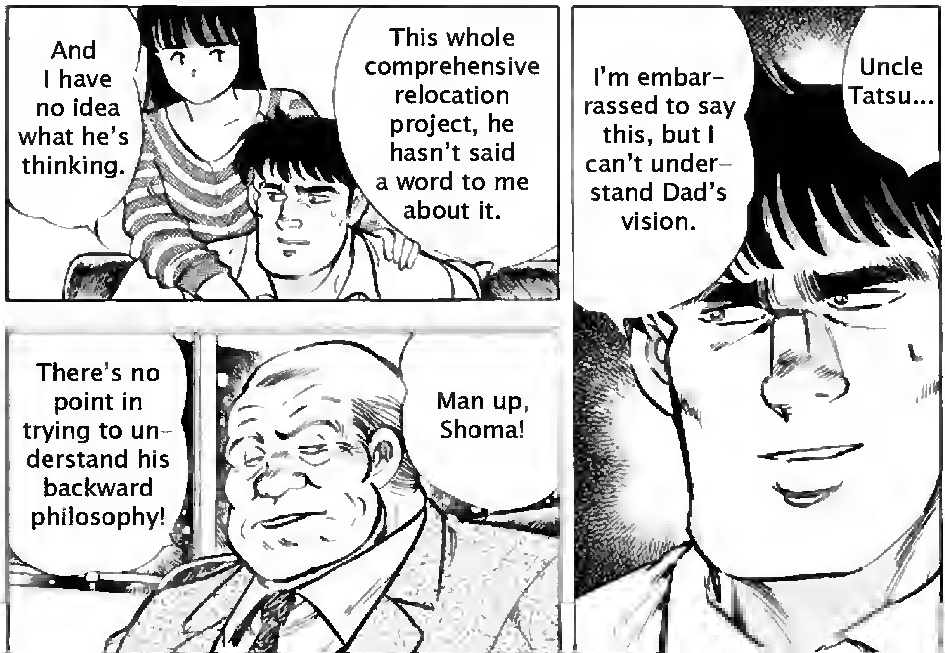

東建興産



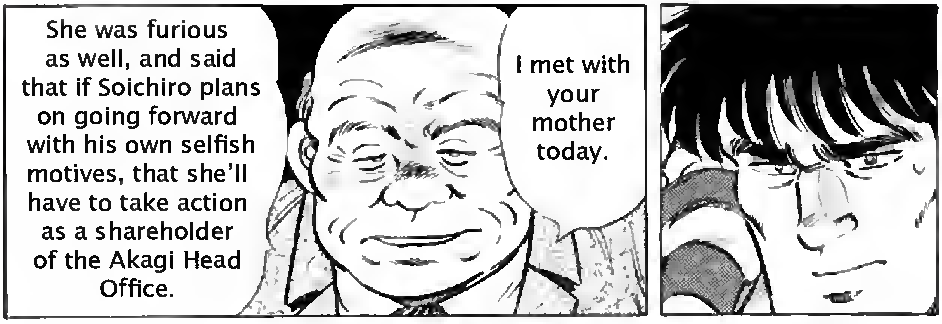
Welcome home, honey.
DING DONG
Uncle Tatsu came for a visit.
Wow, fancy seeing you here.
Hello.
Uncle Tatsu?
He had a private meeting with each of the presidents.
What!?
Soichiro has made his move, Shoma.

Mr. Kasai!?
According to my sources, Kasai has been unofficially selected as the next president of Akagi Head Office, instead of you!
You've been left out of the fold. Try to be strong!
He didn't tell me anything about this.

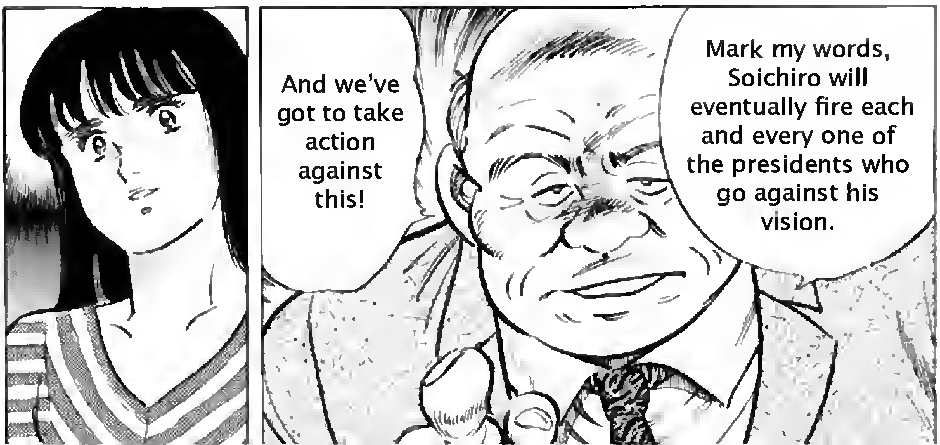
You've got Soichiro Akagi's blood in your veins! And you've been snubbed!
You need to grow some balls! You're the eldest son for crying out loud!
Is that all you've got to say!?
I see...


And I have no idea what he's thinking.
This whole comprehensive relocation project, he hasn't said a word to me about it.
There's no point in trying to understand his backward philosophy!
Man up, Shoma!
I'm embarrassed to say this, but I can't understand Dad's vision.
Uncle Tatsu...

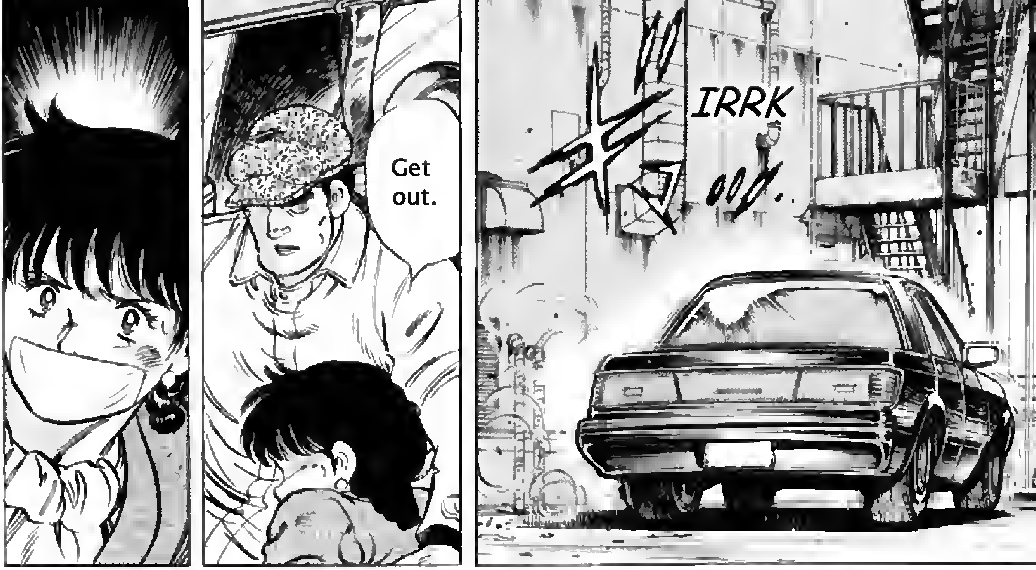
I don't understand it myself. This relocation plan, appointing Kasai as the next president...
...
Some people are saying Soichiro's gone senile.
The presidents have already tried that, and it didn't work!


She was furious as well, and said that if Soichiro plans on going forward with his own selfish motives, that she'll have to take action as a shareholder of the Akagi Head Office.
I met with your mother today.

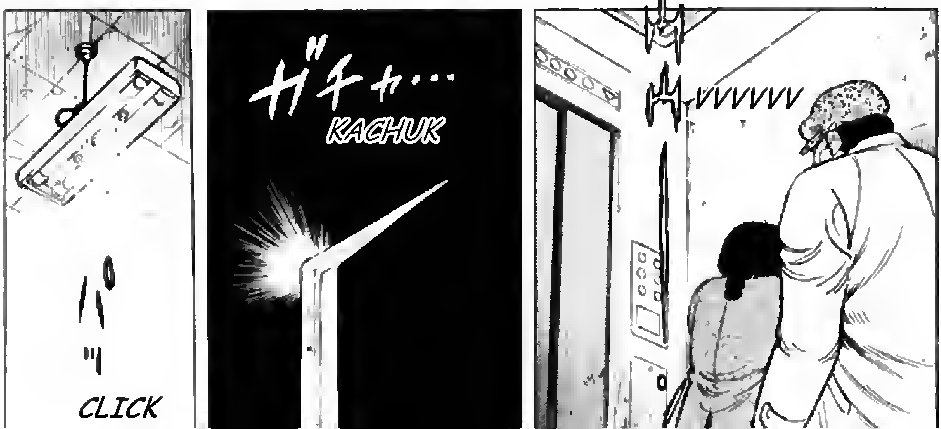
Indeed she did.
Mom said that?


And we've got to take action against this!
Mark my words, Soichiro will eventually fire each and every one of the presidents who go against his vision.

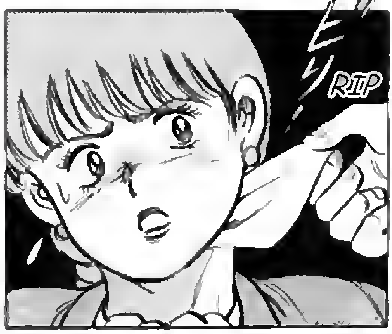
The son must over-take the father!
Your time has come to strike!
Get ready for war, Shoma!
Right...


Get out.
IRRK

In here.


CLICK
KACHUK
VVVVVV

She didn't go back to the office or the apartment.
Something's wrong
RRRRRING
RRRRRING
So she never came back...
No, it's fine. Thanks.
...
Tomorrow, we clean house, Kasai.
Guess I fired pretty much everyone.
Where did you go, Yuri?
Oh, it's nothing.
What is it?


RIP

If anything happens to me...
Make you talk. You tell me what you picked up at the accident, and where it's hidden.

What are you gonna do to me!?

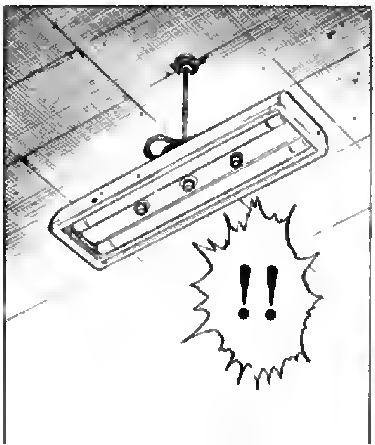
Actually, I mean...
So you did pick it up.
"That bag," huh?

I'm serious!
...that bag goes directly to the police!

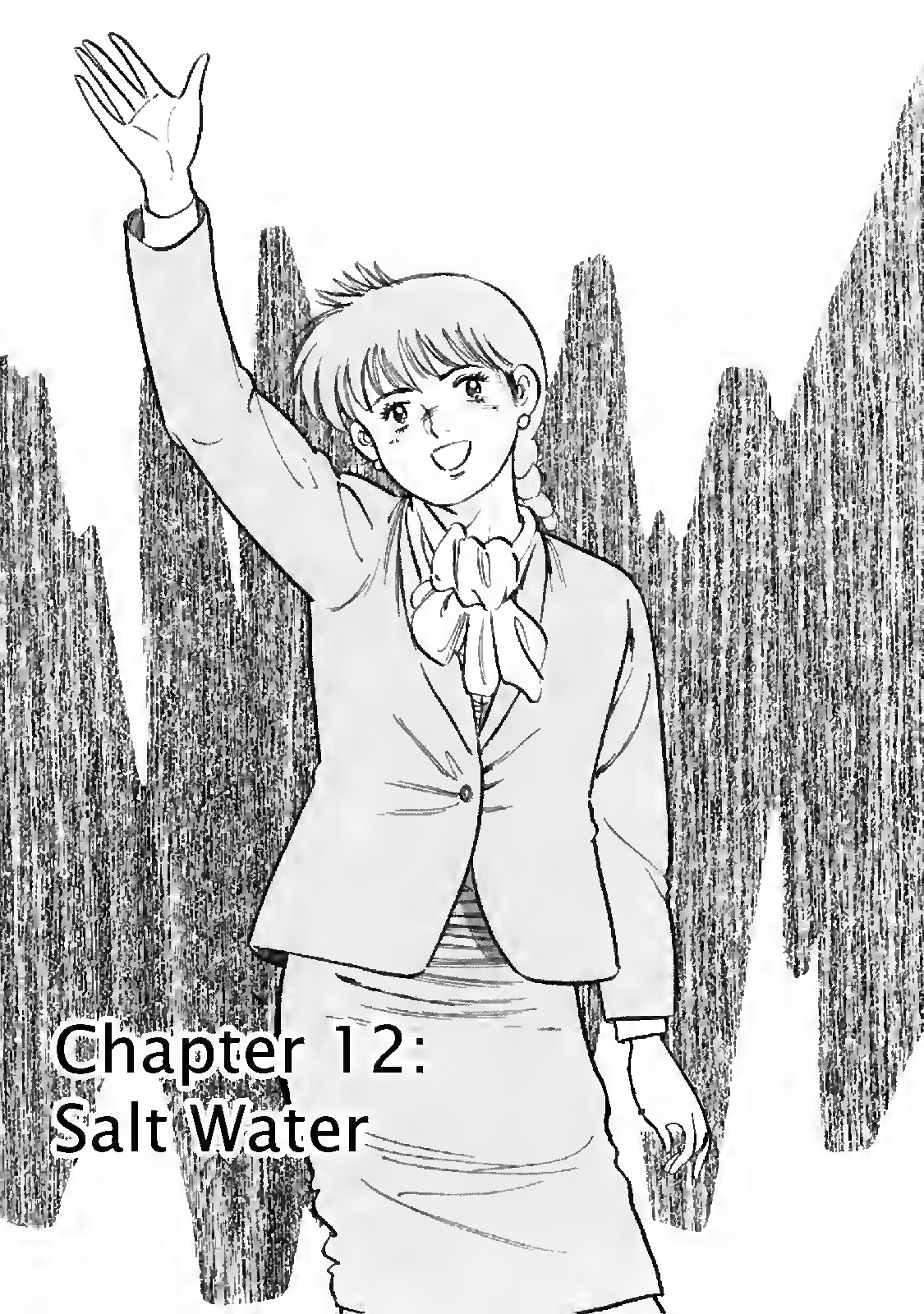
BAM
Ahh!

And I'll take real good care of you.

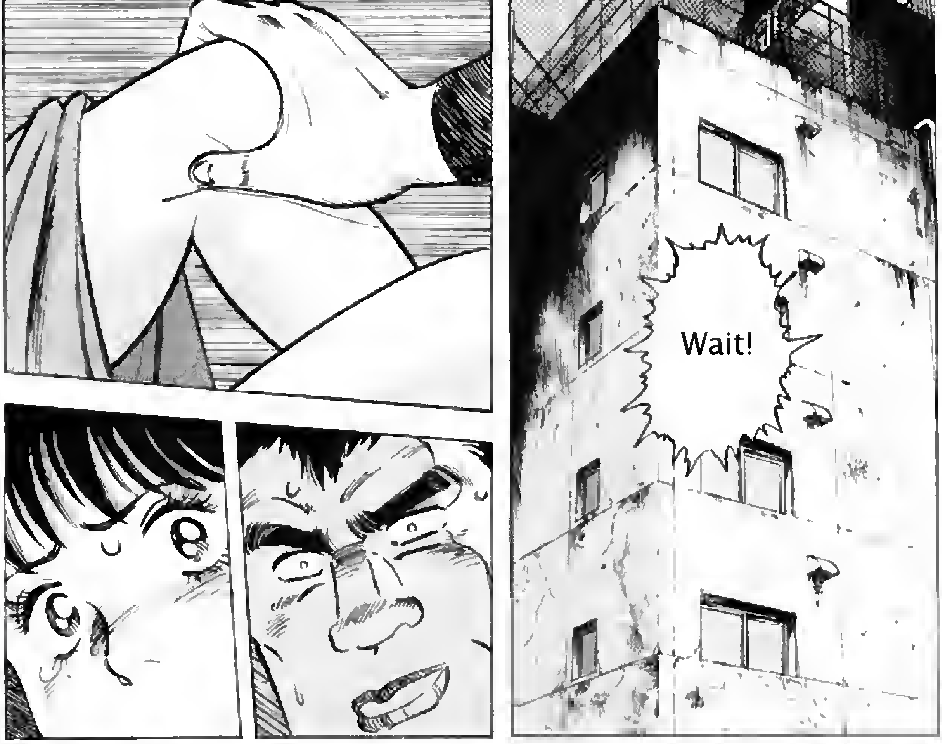
I've got...
...all the time in the world.


!!

Mr. Kasai...
Help!



Chapter 12: Salt Water


Wait!

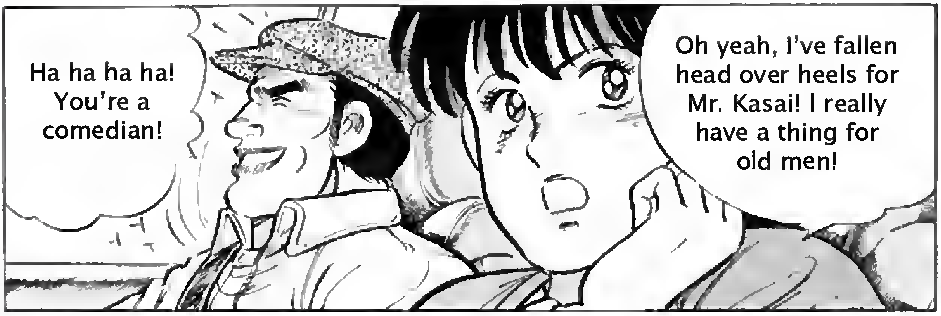
Can't we make a deal!?
Please...

Yes!
If you help me, I'll take you to where the bag is hidden!
A deal?
I made a phone call from the front desk before I started following you.
What!?
You aren't very bright, are you.
Heh! I don't need a deal to make you talk! You'll tell me where that bag is sooner or later.
After I've fully enjoyed myself.
So I need to go get it myself. Is it sinking in yet?
...it goes straight to the press.
To make sure that, if I don't pick up the bag by tomorrow morning...
Still thinking of beating me up and raping me to get me to talk?
...

ZWOOSH

That's none of your busi-ness.
Or is there another reason behind this?

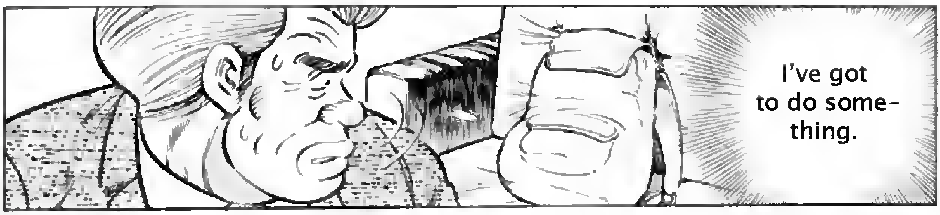
You really go above and beyond to get material for your stories.
You oughta be thinking about your well-being.

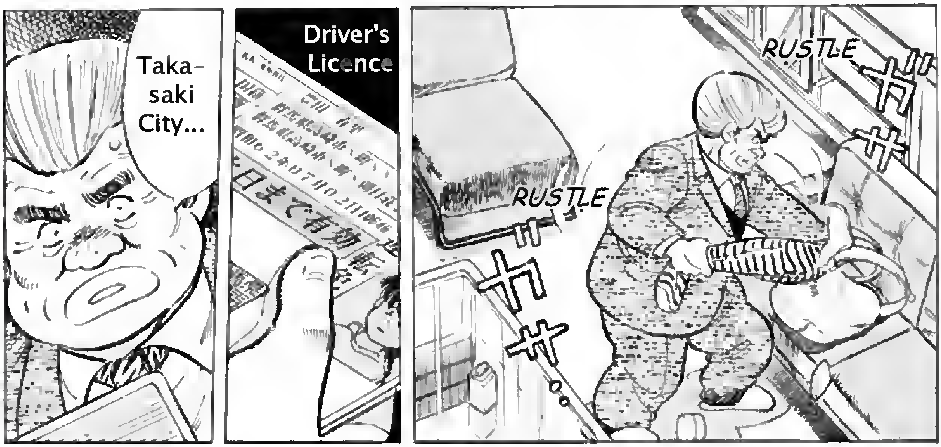

Oh yeah, I've fallen head over heels for Mr. Kasai! I really have a thing for old men!
Ha ha ha ha! You're a comedian!

I've got to find a way to escape.

A regular come-dian.

笠井


I've got to do some-thing.

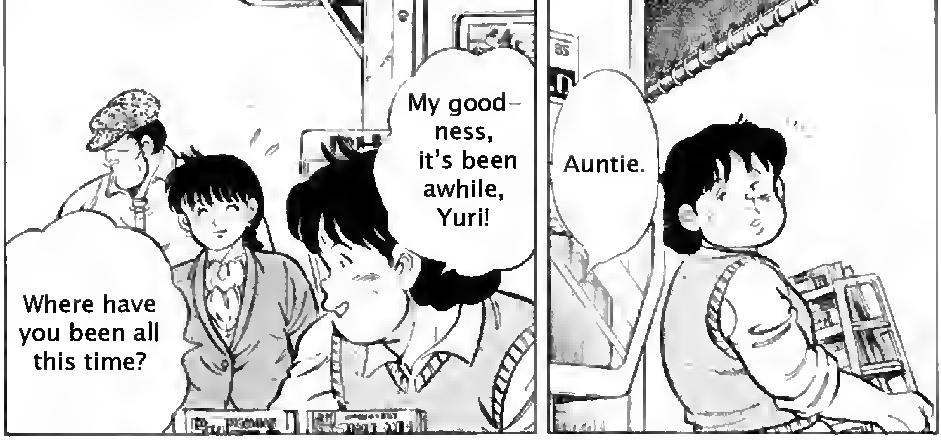

Taka-saki City...
Driver's Licence
RUSTLE
RUSTLE

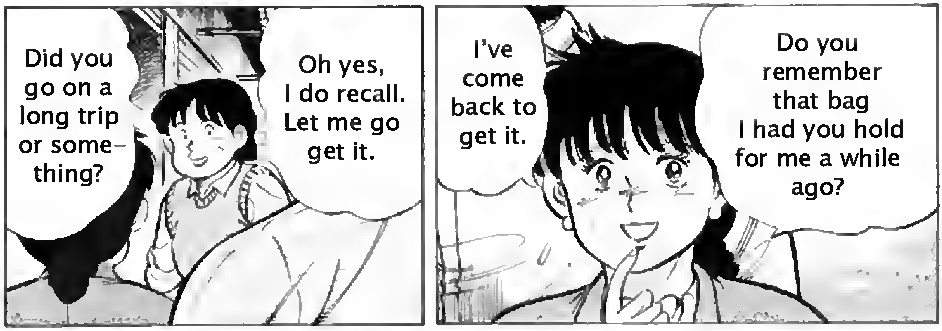
Guess I'll give it a try!
I don't know. This is my only clue.
But if he found her...
...and she really did have that bag...
She would've called me if she went back to her apartment.
GRIP

...is right in this vicinity, sir.
That address...
CABIN
PHONE
Yawn...
RATTLE
RATTLE
RATTLE
KACHUK
Thanks, I'll walk from here.

This is it.
朝日荘
空室アリ
Asahi Manor-Rooms Available
Asahi Manor ...
205 Yuri Toyota
205
豊田有里
...she didn't come back.
...
I guess ...
CLATTER
CLATTER
IRK
I hope you're okay, Yuri.
Dammit.
Now what?

CLICK
And I'll say it again, don't pull any stupid crap.
Let's go get the bag.
That was quite the detour. This must be your apartment, right?
!!
Move it.
It's here.
Yuri...!


My good-ness, it's been awhile, Yuri!
Where have you been all this time?
Auntie.


Did you go on a long trip or some-thing?
Oh yes, I do recall. Let me go get it.
I've come back to get it.
Do you remember that bag I had you hold for me a while ago?

Here you go.
Thanks, Auntie. I owe you one.
...
Uh-huh, pretty much.

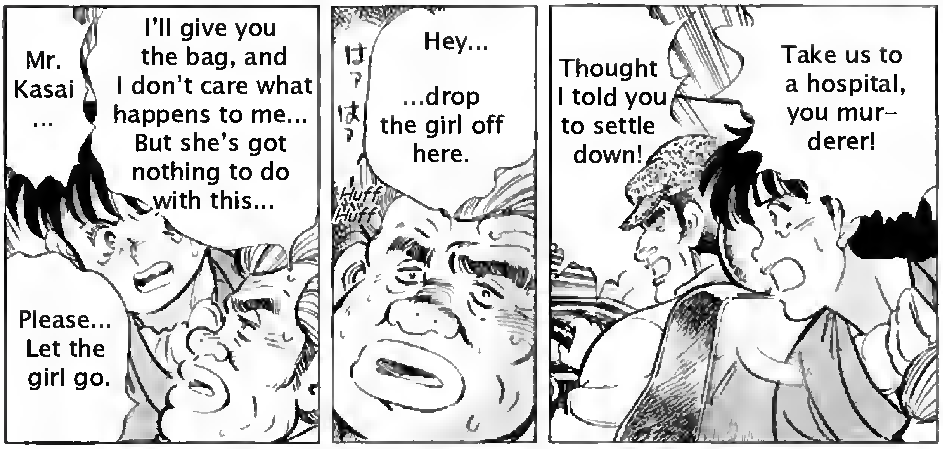
I'm sorry, Auntie. We're in a hurry.
?
Let's go.
Oh, don't be silly... Are you all right dear? You look so pale today.

...!
Mr. Kasai!
Well, what a pleasant surprise, Yuri!
?
GRIP
Is this your friend? My name is Kasai, sir. Yuri's boss.
I've been looking for you. What a fortunate encounter.
...
Let's call it a day and go our separate ways now, shall we?
Or do you want things to get unp-leasant?
GRRRIP
Did you bring the stuff, Yuri?
Mr. Kasai ...
Yes.

I'll walk you to your car.
Look at all these people walking the streets. If you try to start something...
...Mr. Tagawa's reputation will be soiled.
Something's not right about you people...
I'll explain later. There's nothing to worry about.
But Yuri...
I'm fine, Auntie. It's really nothing.
Oh, of course.
Cigarettes, please.
...?

POP
Now get in!
And get lost!
You...
...
No...
SLAM
!?
I think that car back-fired.
What was that?
VRRRRRR

I'll be fine, Yuri... I'll be fine...
But you're bleeding! This is serious!
Settle down! You wanna get shot again!?
Are you okay, sir!?

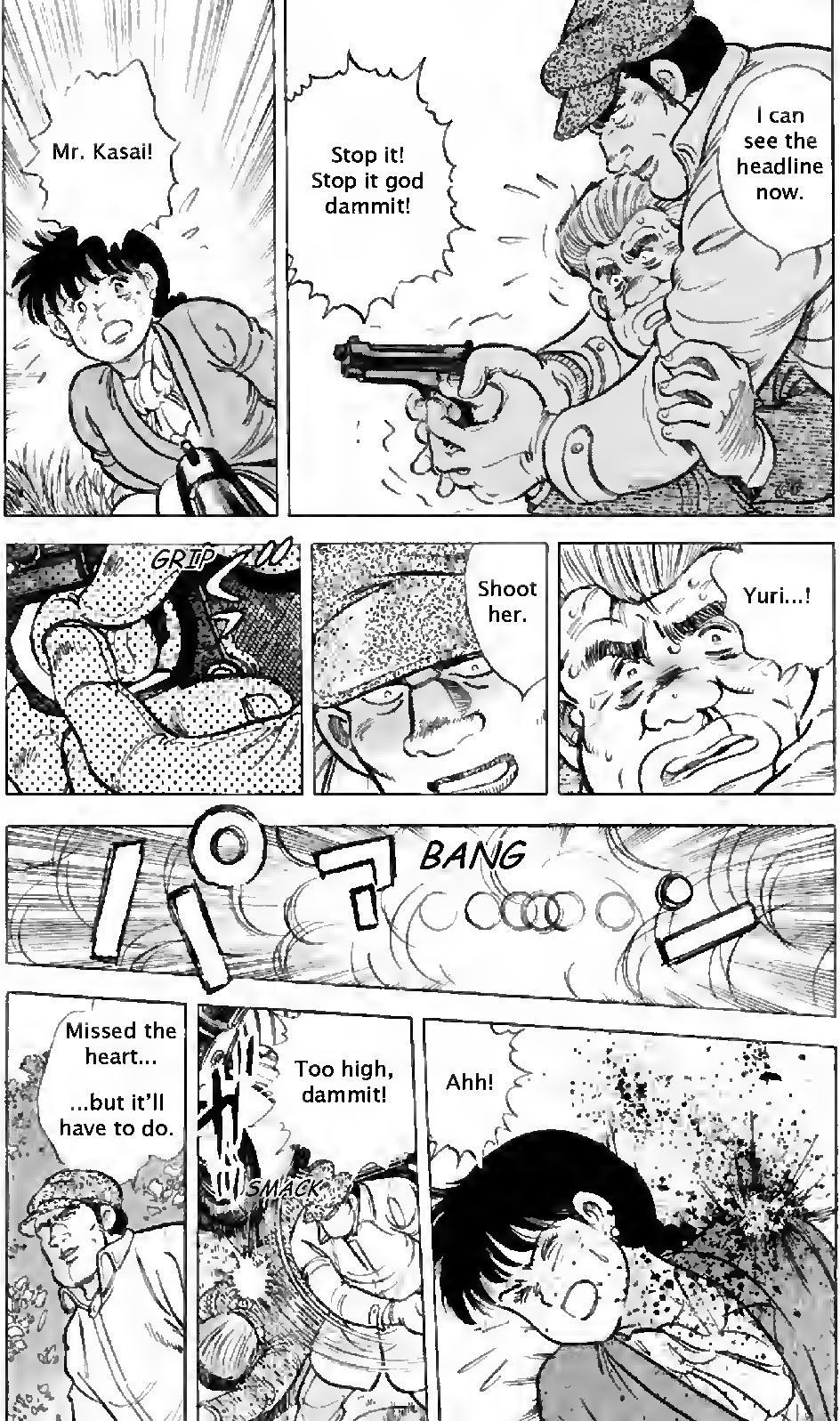

Mr. Kasai ...
I'll give you the bag, and I don't care what happens to me... But she's got nothing to do with this...
Please... Let the girl go.
Hey...
...drop the girl off here.
Hurt Hurt
Thought I told you to settle down!
Take us to a hospital, you murderer!

Hm hm... I heard this chick has a thing for old men.
No can do. I've got a better idea.

KASHOOM
Dropping you off a cliff is the best way to make it look like a suicide or an accident.
Then you're the one who killed Jiro Kida!

KRSHHAA

KASAHHH


Mr. Kasai!
Stop it! Stop it god dammit!
I can see the headline now.
GRIP
Shoot her.
Yuri...!
BANG
Missed the heart...
...but it'll have to do.
Too high, dammit!
SMACK
Ahh!

FWOOH

OOF
SPLASHHH

PSHOOOOLULUL
GULULUL
"F" Volume 17 THE END

F VOL.17

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